

I'll Never Set Foot in That House Again!

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Illustrator Yuki Kana





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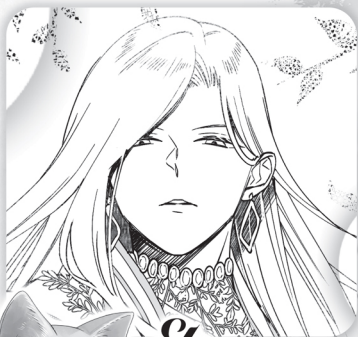


Author
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Glen

A young man possessing a Sage-level [Appraisal] Skill who visited Baron Eucharis's estate for an appraisal. He helps Chelsea after learning about the abuse she endured.



Ele

The Spirit King. Appeared from the "Spirit Tree of Origin" that Chelsea created with her Skill. Taking her as his master, they formed a contract. Normally takes the form of a kitten.



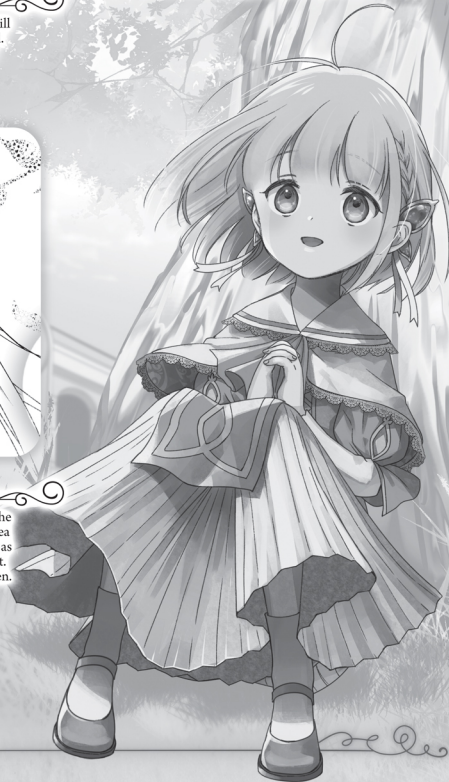
Characters

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Character Introductions

Chelsea

A noble's daughter who was called a failure and tyrannized by her mother and younger twin sister. After awakening to the brand-new Skill [Seed Creation], she came to the Royal Research Institute.





Royz

A dragon beastman who regained his seat as the Radzuel Empire's Emperor. After Chelsea planted a Spirit Tree cutting, he entered into a contract with the Fire Spirit, Irene.



Micah

A foxwoman Chelsea met in the Radzuel Empire. A wonderful chef, who was brought back to Chronowize to be Chelsea's personal chef.



World Map

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I'll Never Set Foot in That House Again!

Prologue

My name is Chelsea. I'm the adopted daughter of Margrave Sargent, and the fiancée of His Highness Prince Glenarnold Snowflake—younger brother of the King of Chronowize and nationally recognized appraiser.

On the day of my twelfth birthday, Lord Glen came to the barony where I had been living a life of abuse, and he'd appraised my Skill. He told me then that I'd awoken to the new Skill [Seed Creation], and as a result, I was promptly brought into the Royal Research Institute as a researcher.

Ever since then, a shocking number of things have happened: I entered a contract with Element the King of Spirits, saved the life of a duke's granddaughter, and was promoted to the position of research fellow. I also went from being the daughter of a baron to the adopted daughter of Margrave Sargent. Not only that, but after planting a cutting of the Spirit Tree at the request of our western neighboring country the Radzuel Empire, Lord Glen and I realized our feelings towards each other and became engaged.

Two months after our engagement was announced, we left Chronowize and headed west to the capital of the Radzuel Empire for a certain reason.

Radzuel's capital was constructed entirely differently from Chronowize's. Thanks to the country's strongest people living along the edges, there were no walls. Whenever monsters or any other enemies attacked, those people would protect the capital. In the center was a wall-less castle with a round roof, the Spirit Tree I had planted before, and a large arena.

After passing through the unfamiliar streets, our carriage stopped in front of the castle gate. A military official immediately came out to greet us. He was an armored rabbitman with bunny ears coming out of his helmet.

Lord Glen got out of the carriage first and spoke to him for a moment before turning back towards me still inside. His hair, dark blue like the evening sky, glistened in the light, and he squinted his aqua eyes with a beautiful smile.

With this angelic expression still on his face, he offered me his hand. "Be careful."

Seeing him always worry about me not only made me happy, but also gave me a desire to follow his example out of respect.

Nodding, I lightly rested my hand in his and stepped out of the carriage. After my feet touched the ground, Lord Glen pulled me a few steps away from the door. Soon after, the silver-furred cat Ele (the King of Spirits' temporary form) hopped out, followed by Miss Micah—a foxwoman who served as my personal chef and maid.

Miss Micah had big fuzzy ears and a fluffy tail, and was usually smiling happily. But for some reason, she currently looked tense, with her tail all tucked in.

She seemed fine while we were in the carriage. I wonder what's wrong?

Just as I wondered that, a few beastwoman maids who had been waiting by the gate approached us. One was a catwoman with triangular ears and a long, thin tail; another was a dogwoman with droopy ears and a fluffy tail. The third was a lizardwoman with scales covering part of her body. All kinds of beastwomen were here, all wearing Radzuel-style maid uniforms.

I could see Miss Micah swallow hard before the group of maids smiled and surrounded her, pulling her into the castle in an instant.

"Huh...?"

In response to my bewildered expression, the rabbitman guard explained with a blank face, "Lady Micah is only being brought to change."

If she's only getting her clothes changed, she should be safe... Right?
As I looked towards the direction she'd been taken in with worry, Ele in his cat form spoke up from beside me.

«If you are worried, I will supervise.»

"Thank you, Ele."

The cat nodded, then followed Miss Micah inside.

Lord Glen squeezed my hand as I watched Ele go. Smiling, he murmured, "Let's head inside too."

"All right," I answered with a nod, squeezing his hand back.

Led by the bunny-eared official, we headed to the drawing room on the castle's second level. The leather sofa inside was big enough that there was still lots of room, even with the two of us sitting there. It was probably made so that larger beastmen could sit too.

"It's been a year and a half since we came here last, so Royz'll probably be shocked at how much you've grown," Lord Glen commented, an upturned grin on his face.

Back when we'd first met Lord Royz, I was so short it was impossible to view me as anything but a child. But I'd had a growth spurt since then, so I probably looked more like a young adult now.

"I've grown about a head taller, after all..." I said, touching my hair, which had grown down to my chest.

“Your hair’s gotten longer too.”

“Yes, it has! I’ve been having fun putting it up lately.”

While we were chatting, a knock came at the door, and a tall dragonman walked inside.

“Long time no see!”

It was none other than Lord Royz, Emperor of Radzuel. His nearly black green hair, braided with a strip of cloth, swayed with every step he took. He smirked, his deep-green eyes looking as if they saw all. Lord Royz’s ears were in the same position as human ones, but they were long and pointy—and on the top of his head grew a pair of thick black horns. He had a tail covered in scales too, but growing from the tip of it was fur the same black-green color as his hair.

His complexion was good, and he looked a lot healthier than the last time we’d seen him.

“It’s been a year and a half, eh?” Lord Glen said, getting up from the sofa and holding out his right hand towards the dragonman.

Lord Royz stuck out his right hand in turn, and they shook. Not only that, but they both used their left hands to smack each other on the shoulder. They had realized they had a common Skill when they’d met, and ended up becoming so close that they dropped all formalities while meeting unofficially.

I stood up too, giving Lord Royz a curtsy. He stared at me, blinking a few times.

“You’ve grown quite a bit, Lady Chelsea!”

“Yes. I’ve recently gotten even taller than Miss Micah,” I answered.

He gave me a warm smile, the same that a parent would give their child, before nodding.

“Oh yeah, where is she, anyway?” he said, looking around the room.

“Some maids carried her off as soon as we arrived at the castle,” Lord Glen answered, getting a wry smile out of the emperor.

“The maids’ve been looking forward to her return, so there’s not much we can do.”

Why’s that? I thought. Seeing my confusion, Lord Royz gave me a comforting grin.

“They’ll bring her back sooner or later, don’t worry. Let’s sit and talk for now.”

After making sure he sat first, both Lord Glen and I sat back down on the sofa we’d been sitting on before.

“You guys got engaged, right? Good to see things worked out,” the dragonman said, looking between the two of us with another grin.

What does he mean? I wondered.

Lord Royz’s eyes fell on the space between Lord Glen and I.

“You’re sitting a lot closer to each other than you were back then, aren’t you?”

Now that he mentions it, we’re sitting right beside each other... Close enough that we’re touching. My face burned in embarrassment at being called out on it. When I glanced up at Lord Glen, he was also covering his mouth bashfully. It seemed he hadn’t realized it either.

While the two of us sat embarrassed, a knock rang out.

“We’ve brought Her Highness the Imperial Princess.”

Following behind the cat-eared maid was Miss Micah, dressed in a lavish outfit, with cat Ele (complete with a little red ribbon on his tail) coming up behind her. The long coat Miss Micah wore was embroidered with lots of gold and silver thread, which glittered as she moved. Her hair, which was usually tied in braids, was left down, with new hair ornaments covered in gems.

“Miss Micah, you’re so beautiful!” I couldn’t help but gasp, seeing her dressed up so extravagantly for the first time.

Her face went red, tail swaying. “Thank you~”

Moving right around her, Ele walked up and jumped to sit beside me. His eyes moved to the tip of his tail, and he heaved a big sigh. He hated having his tail touched, so he must not have liked the ribbon on it at all. *I’ll have to take it off for him later*, I thought, stroking his back lightly. But then I realized that the maid had called Miss Micah “Her Highness the Imperial Princess” when she walked in.



“You being emperor makes your foster daughter Micah the princess, huh, Royz?” Lord Glen commented from beside me, seemingly having read my mind.

What? I’ve been having a princess make my meals? As my eyes widened in shock, Miss Micah cried out.

“I’m not a princess~! I’m... I’m Chelsea’s personal chef~” she said, ears drooping as she sat beside Lord Royz.

“She’s always hated being treated like a princess,” he explained, patting her on the head.

Ever since she’d become my personal chef, she hadn’t tried to go home to Radzuel even once. I’d suggested it a few times, thinking she’d like to see how her foster father was doing, but she always said she wouldn’t go home unless she had business there. And here I was, dragging her home.

“Miss Micah, I’m sorry for forcing you to come back here,” I apologized, only for the foxwoman to shake her head.

“I mean, yeah, but no~! I wanted to visit home, but I just didn’t want to be treated like a princess~ That was why I wasn’t gonna go home unless I had to. Don’t worry~!” she said, waving both hands towards me. “And I’d decided in the first place that I’d always be your personal chef—right until you tell me you don’t want me anymore~ I wouldn’t go home if I didn’t have a reason to~!”

I’d heard that most of the people who worked in the Kingdom of Chronowize sometimes took vacations to go back to their homes. But from how she was speaking, it sounded like Miss Micah had been planning on staying with me forever if she didn’t have a reason otherwise...

“Us beastmen’ll serve the master we swear fealty to until they either die or tell us they don’t need us anymore,” Lord Royz said, stroking his foster daughter’s hair.

“But I don’t remember Miss Micah ever swearing fealty to—”

“I did!” she interjected, shaking her head. “You saved Lord Royz...father’s life~!”

A year and a half before, Lord Royz was clinging to life as he suffered from an illness known as Mana Deficiency Disease. It was because of that that I created the “Elixir Seed,” a seed that could cure any status ailment and restore a person’s mana to its maximum. After drinking the liquid inside of the seed, Lord Royz’s disease was instantly cured, and he regained his position as Radzuel’s emperor.

“It’s completely normal for people to swear fealty to the person who saved their life. I swore fealty to you back then too, didn’t I, Lady Chelsea?” Lord Royz asked.

Now that I thought about it, I could remember him saying

something like that back then.

“Yes, you did,” I replied with a nod.

He gave me a happy smile before looking over at Miss Micah.

“I won’t let anyone complain about becoming your personal chef. They’re actually pretty happy about that. But Micah being my daughter is another story, so she’ll have to dress up while she’s here.”

Miss Micah groaned a little before reluctantly nodding.

“Let’s get to business,” Lord Royz started once things had settled down. “I’ll ask you straight out. Why are you going to the Martec Republic to plant a Spirit Tree cutting?”

The truth was that our true destination wasn’t Radzuel, but the Martec Republic in the northwest of the continent.

“Where should I start...” Lord Glen muttered, putting a hand to his mouth. “You remember the man who caused all the trouble in Radzuel a year and a half ago?”

“You mean that swindler who tricked Bearsley when he was the emperor, got him to chop down all of the Spirit Trees in the Empire, and caused the entire mess with the miasma?”

The swindler they were talking about had attacked us with monsters called Sand Scorpions on our way back to Chronowize. Sand Scorpions were actually very delicious when eaten, so the guard knights with us defeated them in an instant so that Miss Micah could use her [Cooking] Skill to butcher them. We ate them afterwards.

“Men with the same title as that swindler—‘Worshiper of the Proxy, Driven by Envy’—appeared in the capital of Chronowize.”

One of Lord Royz’s eyebrows raised up, and he crossed his arms.

“They have two objectives,” Lord Glen continued, putting up two fingers. “One is destroying the Spirit Tree. The second is killing Chelsea. For that reason, they stole herbs being grown at a marquis’s residence in order to use them on monsters and make them go berserk.”

Lord Royz shot to his feet, eyes wide.

“We caught all of the ones that were in the capital, and neither Chelsea nor the Spirit Tree were harmed.”

“I was completely unharmed,” I said, following up on Lord Glen’s explanation. Lord Royz looked relieved to hear that, and flopped back down on the sofa.

“We used Micah’s [Interrogation] Skill to get them to spit out everything they knew.”

“They were all weird~! They were targeting Chelsea because the Proxy saw her in a magic mirror and said *she* couldn’t forgive her, or something~!” Miss Micah complained with a pout.

A magic mirror was apparently an object that could show you any place in the world.

“So the Proxy is behind all of this.”

Miss Micah shook her head. “We can’t be sure about that~!”

“The one who gave the orders to the men we’d captured wasn’t the Proxy, but a man who was her attendant,” Lord Glen clarified, only for Ele to finally speak up.

«The Proxy...is an old friend of mine. She is not someone who would approve of murder,» he said from his spot beside me, raising his head and looking determined. «I’d like to meet with her directly and learn the truth.»

“Since we know where she is, I think asking her directly is a good idea,” Lord Glen said.

Lord Royz looked confused at Lord Glen’s words. “What does any of that have to do with planting a Spirit Tree cutting?”

«So that’s why!»

Just as Lord Royz was re-crossing his arms, a large, bright-red bird appeared inside the room. *It’s Irene, the Spirit of Fire that he was contracted to.* Irene had appeared from Radzuel’s Spirit Tree when I planted it, and we were pen pals.

«It’s been quite a long time, Lady Chelsea.» When I smiled back at her, the bird-formed Spirit moved to Lord Royz’s side, opposite from Miss Micah. «As I told you before, the Four Great Spirits erected a barrier around the Demonic Forest where Her Lady the Proxy lives. Until that barrier is removed, we cannot enter.»

“Then why not just call ’em all out and get it gone?” Lord Royz complained, only for the Spirit to shake her head.

«In accordance with ancient limitations, only one Great Spirit may appear from each cutting, planted about a country’s distance away from each other.»

“That’s a pain in the ass.” Lord Royz retorted, sighing.

«This alone is something we Spirits cannot do anything about...» Ele said in response as he slumped down.

“So because of all of that, we’ve asked other countries to allow us to plant cuttings of the Spirit Tree,” Lord Glen followed up. “The Martec Republic responded immediately, so we’re headed there.”

“I see.” The dragonman nodded.

“That’s why we’d like permission to approach Radzuel’s Spirit Tree the morning of our departure, just as I’d mentioned in my letters.”

“Oh yeah, you said you’d be going to get the cutting you need to plant.”

Spirits, their contractors, and those who had the Spirit’s permission could use the Spirit Trees to go to the Spirit World, and then to another Tree from there. We were going to use that method to go from Radzuel’s Tree to the Spirit Tree of Origin in Chronowize to

pick up the cutting branch.

“But why do you need to go the morning you’re leaving?” Lord Royz asked, tilting his head with a hand to his chin.

“Spirit Trees are plants too, so Ele needs to constantly be casting magic to prevent the branch from drying out or being harmed until it’s planted,” I explained, getting nods from the cat-formed Spirit.

«It is incredibly taxing to maintain this cast, so I would like to leave the cutting to the last minute we can.»

“Oh, then do you want me to take you to the border? If I bring you, the fifteen-day trip’ll only take half a day,” Lord Royz offered.

Ele immediately shot up to stand on his hind legs.

«That would be a great help!» the Spirit King said, eyes sparkling as he stretched his front legs out in joy.

Kitties are so cute when they stand up like that... I thought, watching him out of the corner of my eye.

Then, Lord Royz continued, “In exchange, I’d like for you guys to stay here longer.”

“We’ve already told Martec when we’d planned to reach the border gate, so staying longer is no problem, but...” Lord Glen put a hand to his mouth, thinking.

“I’ll get horses ready for you from the town closest to the border gate, and contact the inns that you were planning on staying at for you. How about it?”

“Seems you really wanna keep us,” Lord Glen said, smiling wryly.

“Is anything the matter?” I asked worriedly, only to get a headshake of denial.

“We’ve got no problems. It’s just...our country was in a poor state last time, and we couldn’t give you a proper welcome, right? I’d decided we were gonna go all out next time you came!” Lord Royz said, standing up and gripping his fist tight.

“Oh yeah, beastmen take welcoming their guests seriously, don’t they?”

“That we do. Honestly, everyone in the castle’s been upset that we couldn’t treat you properly during your last visit. So please, stay longer, for their sake.”

«There is no problem if I will be able to shorten the length of time I am required to cast magic on the cutting,» said Ele, still standing on his hind legs.

“Is that all right with you, Chelsea?”

“Yes,” I nodded, not seeing any problem with it.

“Then we’ll lengthen our stay in exchange for Royz bringing us to the border gate,” Lord Glen announced before looking over in Miss Micah’s direction. When I followed his gaze, I saw that she was pale and shaking.

Lord Royz noticed too, and he smirked. “I won’t tell you to act all princess-like, Micah, but at least dress up while you’re here.”

“Noooooooo~!”

Miss Micah’s scream echoed through the castle.

1. Commendation Ceremony and Party

Since we'd arrived at the imperial capital late in the afternoon, it was decided that we'd continue our conversation after dinner.

"Go get yourselves cleaned up before dinner," Lord Royz said, calling for the cat-eared maid who had brought Micah to us, and instructing her to bring Lord Glen and I to the guest rooms on the third floor.

The maid smiled and bowed before leading us to our rooms.

"I was told that you are engaged, so we've prepared separate rooms that have a connected space," the maid said.

"Thank you. We appreciate it," replied Lord Glen, stepping into the first door we were brought to. I was led to the room farther in.

"Wow..." I couldn't help but breathe a sigh of wonder the moment I stepped inside.

Back during our last visit, the country had been in trouble due to the miasma—and they'd had fiscal problems as well—so our guest rooms had been clean, yet very simple. This time, however, the room was so gorgeous that you would never have believed the country was in trouble at all. And it felt very welcome and warm too.

To think things could change this much in a year and a half! Thinking about how it was proof that Lord Royz and the people of the Empire had worked so hard made me happy.

"Is it to your liking?"

"Yes, it's a wonderful room!" I replied with a firm nod.

The maid gave me a warm smile and said, "Please, take it easy and heal your fatigue from your journey."

"Thank you very much!"

I smiled back, and she picked up a bell from on top of a nearby table and rang it. After she did, a number of maids entered the room. They all looked just as skillful as the cat-eared maid, and their Radzuel-style uniforms with their collar crossed above the chest looked wonderful on them. They must have been experienced.

"We will be assisting you today," said the cat-eared maid with a smile as the maids all started working at once. One scooped me up and carried me to the bathroom on the opposite end from the door to the connecting room.

"Ah..." As I cried out something that didn't even register as a

word, I was put down. My training to become ladylike had paid off, since I didn't scream in shock...

I had no time to escape from reality as they quickly stripped me. Then, I was splashed with lukewarm water and washed carefully with soap and soft cloth. It made me remember the first day I was brought to Chronowize's Royal Research Institute. *I wonder what my maids Gina and Martha are doing?*

After I was washed, I was soaked in a bathtub with flower petals floating in the water.

"We've added saraliah sap to the bathwater as it has a healing effect. We've also added its flower petals," explained a maid as I picked up one of the petals, which was the size of my palm. It was as thick as a pancake, but also as soft. If the petals were this big, then the flowers themselves must have been large too.

"Saraliah petals have a healing effect when eaten as well," another maid piped in.

Maybe I should try eating it, I thought to myself as I looked closely at the petal, but all of the maids shook their heads. *How did they know, when I didn't say anything?! Maybe it's a skill experienced maids have!*

Once I was out of the bath, I was given a massage with floral-scented liquid.

"Is this smell...saraliah?" I asked, getting an affirmative answer immediately. I was happy to know they were trying so hard to heal my fatigue.

After my massage was over, I was wiped off and my hair was dried. Then, they changed me into a Radzuel-style outfit. The top had a collar crossed over above the chest, while the skirt was straight and reached to my ankles. It looked like what Miss Micah had been wearing.

"Thank you very much," I said, and the maids smiled back at me.

Once I was bathed and dressed, the cat-eared maid led me to the dining room that was also located here on the third floor. Inside, Lord Royz, Miss Micah, and Lord Glen were already seated. All three were also dressed differently than they'd been before, and had glowing skin and glossy hair to boot. *It looks like everyone else took baths too.*

"I'm so sorry for being so terribly late." I apologized as soon as I walked inside the room, but they all just shook their heads at me.

"You're not late enough to be called 'so terribly late.'"

"Don't worry about it~"

"I just got here, so you're fine."

A dog-eared waiter on standby near the wall pulled out the chair beside Lord Glen for me to sit.

"Thank you," I said, as I took my seat.

"I got 'em to make some food you're sure to like, Glen." Lord Royz

smirked proudly as the food was carried in from the attached kitchen.

What they brought out was sukiyaki, exactly like Miss Micah would make on cooler days. Each person's serving was in their own hot pot atop a small magic burner.

"Just like a ryokan or a traditional Japanese restaurant, huh?" murmured Lord Glen, using words I'd never heard before. Lord Royz just smiled silently.

Once the ingredients were all heated up, the smell of the Radzuel Empire's specialty soy sauce wafted throughout the room. Watching all this unfold, Lord Glen's eyes were sparkling like stars. Other than the sukiyaki, there were also bowls of spinach boiled with soy, as well as meat and potato stew.

After everything had been brought out to the table, the four of us were left alone in the room.

"Let's eat before it gets cold," Lord Royz announced.

Nodding at his words, I said my prayers to the earth gods before we all said our thanks for the food at once.

First, I picked up the chopsticks and used them to mix up the raw egg—which had had any impurities removed with *Clean*. I was pretty accustomed to eating with chopsticks now, having learned how to use them back when Miss Micah started cooking for me. Once the egg was mixed, I dipped the thin, flavor-soaked meat into it, then finally gave it a taste. *Mmm, the meat is so soft and delicious!*

I glanced over to Lord Glen beside me, only to see him stuffing his mouth with a big grin. I couldn't help but be mesmerized by the sight of him enjoying himself so much as he ate, even if he was doing it so quickly.

"What's up? Is there something you can't eat?" Lord Royz asked me, smirking as he did. I quickly shook my head.

I can't tell him I was entranced by how Lord Glen's eating! That'd be too embarrassing!

"Not at all, I'm fine with everything here," I replied. Then I ate the vegetables and mushrooms on the side before moving on to spinach and stew.

Once I'd finished eating and thanked him for my meal, Lord Royz spoke.

"So, we're planning on having a commendation ceremony for Lady Chelsea tomorrow."

"Huh?" I gasped.

"You didn't just save my life, you saved the lives of my citizens too," he explained with a serious expression. "Do you remember planting pumpkin seeds on your route home?"

I do remember planting pumpkin seeds at every rest stop we made for the horses, but is that really commendation-worthy...? I tilted my head,

confused.

“Back then, the Empire’s vegetation was all but withered due to the miasma; no crops for food could grow. But you, Lady Chelsea, planted pumpkins that would always sprout. I can’t even tell you how many lives those pumpkins saved from starvation...” Lord Royz’s expression then changed to a grin. “Of course you should be commended for it. Be proud!”

Hearing all this, I was taken aback. It seemed I wasn’t the only one surprised as beside me, Lord Glen murmured, “This is news to me too.”

“You’re always way too sudden with things, Lord Royz~!” exclaimed Miss Micah from her seat across from me. “What is Lady Chelsea even gonna wear?!”

Since we were only planning on going to the Martec Republic and planting the Spirit Tree cutting, I’d only brought the absolute minimum number of fancy dresses and accessories with me.

“Don’t worry, Rene’s been downright gleeful getting everything together,” Lord Royz replied, arms crossed and a smirk on his face.

Rene, the Spirit of Fire, had mentioned in her letters that she’d been going out shopping in her human-like Spirit form. Given her love of dressing up, I was sure she’d put together a wonderful outfit for me.

“Well, that’s the scoop, so get all rested tonight for tomorrow.”

With those final words from the emperor, we each returned to our own rooms.

+ + +

The next morning, I woke up surrounded by beastwoman maids. *Bunny ears, dog ears, cat ears, horse ears... Some are fluffy, some are smooth; I just want to touch them all...* While I thought about that in my grogginess, the cat-eared maid gave me a smile.

“Good morning, Lady Chelsea.”

Brought back to my senses, I gave my morning greetings. “Good morning.”

They all smiled at me as I bashfully sat myself up.

“Let’s get you ready.”

First, I was given a bowl of water to wash my face with. Afterwards, I was handed a soft towel to dry myself off, then was put in a dress, and had my hair fixed. With these morning preparations done, I was brought to the connected space between my room and Lord Glen’s for breakfast.

“We’ve prepared pancakes for your breakfast, as we’ve heard you are fond of them.”

My stomach growled at the sight before me. On the table was a high stack of fluffy pancakes, drizzled with white yogurt sauce.

“Thank you very much.”

As I sat down, Lord Glen walked into the room as well.

“Good morning, Chelsea,” he greeted me. “Did you sleep well?”

“Good morning. Yes, I did.”

After sitting on the other side of the round table, he stared at the food. “Looks delicious.”

I smiled and nodded in agreement.

Once we’d both said our prayers to the earth gods, I picked up my fork and knife and took a bite. *This is so delicious!* The yogurt sauce had a good balance of sweetness and sourness while the pancakes themselves were fluffy.

“You need to get ready for the commendation ceremony after this, right?”

“Yes. Although, I’ve heard that I’ll be bathing first,” I replied, sipping my post-meal tea.

“I was told to have a bath after I finished eating too,” he said, nodding.

“Really? I wonder why?”

Neither of us knew the answer, and after we wondered together, we headed back to our respective rooms. The maids had been waiting for me, smiles on all their faces.

“Just as we informed you before, we’ll have you fully bathe and cleanse your body.”

“Why do I need to ‘cleansing my body?’” I asked on the way to the bathroom, only for the cat-eared maid to give me a wry smile.

“More than one hundred years ago, before His Majesty rose to the throne...many who attended commendation ceremonies did so without cleansing themselves first. This led to the venue being filled with an...offensive smell.”

Offensive smell? What does that mean? I wondered, unable to imagine it.

“Most of those attending the ceremonies would be the stronger citizens who lived on the outer edge of the capital... These individuals trained quite often, and would typically continue training right up until it was time for the ceremony. In the end, they would attend dripping with sweat...”

“So they smelled...of sweat?”

The cat-eared maid nodded. “Back then, the *Clean* spell was not widely adopted yet, so it was quite troublesome. The smell bothered His Majesty as well, so he created a rule where those participating in a ceremony must cleanse themselves first.”

They smelled so bad they had to make a rule?! I shuddered at the thought.

Once I was thoroughly cleansed, I would be dressed. *I wonder what*

kind of outfit Rene picked out? Excited, I left the bathroom to see what Radzuel-style outfit I'd be wearing.

What was laid out for me resembled the clothing I'd worn to dinner the night before. *The texture of the cloth, embroidery, lace, and frills makes it look super cute!* And...I was relieved that the design didn't make my barely-there chest look even smaller.

"You'll be wearing this top over your outfit," a bunny-eared maid said, gesturing to the side.

Oh! I didn't think there would be an accompanying piece. Following the maid's gesture, I saw there was a long-hemmed coat made of thin, nearly see-through cloth. Not only was it embroidered, but it also had sparkling gems interwoven in places.

Once I was in both the outfit and coat, my chest-length hair was braided intricately. Then, some light makeup was applied to my face. With earrings and a necklace put on as a final touch, I was ready to go. *Wow, I can't believe how little time this took.* It was probably because I didn't have to deal with a corset. *It's so nice not having to be squeezed into Radzuel-style outfits.*

Before noon, the cat-eared maid led me to the venue for the commendation ceremony. Surprisingly, it was in a large garden to the west of the castle.

"What do you do when it rains?" I asked.

"In those instances, His Majesty will erect a spherical barrier that covers the entire castle grounds," the maid answered my question. "It's always strange to see the barrier repel the rain."

"I would love to see that." I giggled, and the cat-eared maid smiled back.

It was fun being surprised at all the differences between Chronowize and Radzuel.

Once we arrived at the venue, I saw all of the beastmen attendees gathered. Both the men and women had broad shoulders and looked strong. However, seeing all the fluffy ears and bushy tails made them a bit less intimidating. Most of the people with ears on the tops of their heads had earrings, while those with horns like Lord Royz had cloth wrapped around them, or in their hair. *I wonder if that's some sort of custom?*

While the maid led me through the garden, I saw an elevated stage covered in gorgeous decorations. On it, Lord Royz and Miss Micah each sat on their own large, lavish sofas. The outfits they wore were even more dazzling than anything I'd seen on them before. Miss Micah, in particular, seemed to glisten in the light with her hairpiece, earrings, and necklace.

Averting my eyes from the sparkling, I saw Lord Glen standing next to the stage. Surprisingly, he was also in Radzuel-style clothing.

His outfit was rather dark, in order to match with his hair color, but it suited him so well that I froze for a moment.

I walked over, and after exchanging greetings, he stared fixedly at my face.

"I'd thought it last night too, but you really look good in any outfit, Chelsea."

"You look wonderful too, Lord Glen," I replied bashfully.

I'd only said what I'd been thinking, but he covered his lips with a hand. His ears were slightly red, so he might have been embarrassed too.

"I... I didn't expect you to say something like that back," he stammered.

Realizing I'd caught him off guard, I giggled.

While the two of us chatted, a loud sound rang out. I looked towards where it'd come from and realized it was the sound of a big, round, metal object on the side of the stage being hit.

"That's an instrument called a gong, and it's rung to signal that people should focus on the stage," Lord Glen explained quietly after looking fixedly at the stage. He'd probably just used his [Appraisal] Skill to inspect it.

"We will now begin the commendation ceremony for the Radzuel Empire's savior," bellowed the blue-horned man who had rung the gong.

"There's your cue. See you after."

"See you." I nodded back at Lord Glen before ascending the stage with the cat-eared maid. I was incredibly nervous, feeling the gazes of all of the beastmen in attendance on me.

"When stepping onto a stage, pay attention to your posture and walk slowly to look graceful." I thought back to my adoptive mother's words, and did just as she instructed.

Once I made it to the middle of the stage, hiding my nervousness the whole way, Lord Royz stood from his seat. Then, he moved to stand beside me before speaking loudly.

"This woman before you is the one who cured my illness, and extended a helping hand when our country was in need! You all must know of the miraculous pumpkins grown at the rest stops!"

Almost every beastman in attendance gave firm nods.

"Lady Chelsea was the one who planted those pumpkins. Now, I bequeath to her the title of 'Savior of the Radzuel Empire,' and welcome her as a friend of the beastmen!"

Lord Royz's declaration was met with great applause. I wasn't quite sure what to do, this being the first time I'd been applauded by so many people.

I glanced over at Miss Micah, who had a proud smile on her face,

and then to Lord Glen, whose eyes were wide with shock. From their reactions, I guessed being given a title was something to be happy about.

“I present her this, as a reward,” continued Lord Royz, accepting a thick book from an official. “This is a book on plants, readable only by beastmen.”

“But wouldn’t that mean...I can’t read it?” I whispered quietly, only to get a grin back.

“You’ve been bestowed a title making you a friend of the beastmen. You can read it now. That’s why I want you to have it.”



He was right. He'd handed me the book so that I could see the cover, and I somehow understood what was written there. *So titles can do something like this... Amazing!* Once I had accepted the book, there was another roar of applause.

"Thank you so very much."

After giving my thanks, I did another slow walk off of the stage to look elegant. Lord Glen was there waiting for me.

"Good job."

Seeing his usual gentle smile broke the tension, and I heaved a sigh of relief.

"I was so nervous, Lord Glen..." I murmured.

He patted me on the back and said, "You looked confident—not a hint of nervousness at all."

I was happy to know that I'd done the right thing by following Mother's instructions.

"You've been given a new title, so would it be all right for me to appraise you?"

I nodded, and Lord Glen's gaze traveled to just above my head. He had a Sage-level [Appraisal] Skill, and apparently could always see a person's name or health. If he used more mana, he would also be able to see their height, weight, Skills, place of birth...and even things they were hiding.

I didn't have anything to hide from him, and since he'd looked at my health when he first met me, I wasn't opposed to him seeing my height or weight. That was why I'd told him before that he didn't need to ask before appraising me. But even so, he always made sure to ask first. *I want to learn to be as considerate as he is...*

"'Savior of the Radzuel Empire' has been added to your list of occupations. The effect makes you equal to beastmen, and allows you to read their language. It also lets you enter and exit the country freely."

"Would that mean I wouldn't need identification to enter?"

"Probably." He shrugged.

While Lord Glen and I were talking, Lord Royz shouted from the stage, "The ceremony is finished! Now eat, drink, and be merry!"

That signaled the end of the ceremony and the beginning of the after-party. Everyone around me looked excited, all walking towards the building.

It seemed that tables had been set out along the castle walls, and food was being brought out to them. There were also chefs distributing the food they made right there, and people had started gathering around. I couldn't make out what the chefs were making from where I was, but it smelled good.

As I watched the people, someone spoke to me. "Lady Chelsea." Turning around, I saw it was Lord Royz.

"About the book I gave you..." he continued quietly, looking towards the book in my arms. "Some of the plants in there are medicinal to beastmen, but poisonous to humans. If at all possible, please try to make sure other people don't see it. I mean, it's got a spell cast on it to make it illegible to anyone but beastmen, but sometimes there are people who can read it anyway, like Glen..."

"Huh?!" I looked over to Lord Glen in shock, only for him to look away from me.

"I'm...pretty sure Glen wouldn't use anything he read for evil, but..." Lord Royz continued, staring at Lord Glen, who just smiled silently in return.

"All right. I'll try my best to keep others from seeing it," I replied, willing the Spirit Tree Bracelet on my left wrist to take the book. As I did, it vanished. The bracelet was connected to a special storage room just for me in the Spirit World, and the Spirits there would store or return any items there with just a thought or whisper from me.

Wait... Would it be bad if the Spirits there read the book?!

"U-Um..." I yelped, before asking Lord Royz. According to him, Spirits would probably be okay.

"Now that you've got your hands free, enjoy the party!" he said, walking towards Miss Micah, who was surrounded by male beastmen. She was forcing a smile, but wasn't putting up a fuss. As soon as Lord Royz came near, the men scattered like flies.

Miss Micah is gorgeous all dressed up. Of course she'd attract men's gazes...

"How about we follow Royz's advice and enjoy the party?" Lord Glen asked, holding out an arm to me.

"All right," I replied, placing a hand on his arm, and getting a happy smile back.

Then, the two of us headed to a table with relatively few people. On the table were large plates, with mountains of omurice, various flavored pastas, and gratin.

"So it's buffet style, huh..." Lord Glen murmured.

Not knowing what that meant, I tilted my head.

He explained, "You take portions of as many different things as you want to eat until you're full."

The table we were beside had eight different dishes, while the table next to it had potato salad, macaroni salad, and a variety of raw vegetables. The next table over had both normal and hamburger steaks, and also various other meats. I could even see a table with dumplings like gyoza and shumai. Even further, I could also see a table of desserts, so there were possibly a hundred different things to eat.

“It’s going to be hard to choose...” I strained to smile, only for Lord Glen to explain further.

“If you don’t know what to pick, take tiny bits of everything. Then, once you’ve tasted them all, go back and take more of the things you liked best.”

I got excited once I realized I could eat so many different dishes.

“Let’s check out what’s at each table before we start taking our shares.”

“Okay,” I replied with a nod.

And so, the two of us walked around, checking all of the tables. I could see a lot of the very strong-looking beastmen were in front of the table with most of the meat dishes, and a chef was cutting roast beef before everyone’s eyes. Conversely, the table with salad and vegetable dishes had a crowd of beastmen with bunny ears, horse ears, and other gentler-looking animal ears.

“The stronger beastmen must like meat,” Lord Glen commented, and I nodded in agreement.

The table at the very end had not only bite-sized rounds of fruit, small cups of mousse, and square slices of cake—but also other desserts like red bean soup and tricolor dango.

“They’re all so cute and wonderful,” I murmured, getting a gentle smile back from Lord Glen.

Once we’d seen all of the tables, we each set out to pick our choices.

“What would you like, Chelsea?”

“I’d like the gyoza, shumai, and soup dumplings from that table.”

“Let’s go together then,” said Lord Glen, picking up a tray as he went.

As we made it to the table, I saw that they’d added glossy, steamed shrimp dumplings to the selection. They were just a bit smaller than bite-sized—light pink and adorable!

It seemed that Lord Glen noticed how my eyes were sparkling, because he picked up a plate of them.

“Want anything else?”

“Next... Shumai, spring rolls, soup dumplings.”

Everything I named, Lord Glen picked up. Before I knew it, he’d picked up everything I’d wanted to eat.

“This okay?”

“Thank you so much!” I smiled, taking the neatly stacked tray from him.

After that, he filled up a tray with the things he wanted. With plates in hand, we moved a slight distance away, to sit on benches with attached tables set out for eating. Sitting beside each other, we looked at the castle as we ate.

It was bad manners in Chronowize for nobility to talk during meals, but it seemed it was okay in Radzuel, because I could make out bits of cheerful conversations all around me. It was strange and kind of fun to eat surrounded by so many voices.

When I took a bite of the tender shrimp dumplings, they were just so delicious that I couldn't help but hum in contentment. I could hear a chuckle from beside me, and when I looked over, Lord Glen was laughing.

"Want another one?" he asked, picking up another shrimp dumpling with his chopsticks and holding it out to me.

I was torn. I wanted to eat it because it tasted delicious, but it would also be incredibly embarrassing to be fed in front of so many people. In the end, my desire to have another dumpling won, and I opened my mouth. Lord Glen's eyes squinted happily as he fed me, but the embarrassment and the pounding of my heart from seeing his expression made it hard to taste the second dumpling...

Once we were finished eating and having our post-meal tea, a man with dog ears came by and spoke to us.

"Prince Glenarnold, Lady Chelsea, it's been so long!" The dog-eared man greeted us, bowing slightly. "I was one of the military officers who accompanied you to the Radzuel-Chronowize border."

"Ah, you were with us when we defeated those Sand Scorpions, right?" Lord Glen responded. The way he was looking just above the man's head let me know that he was appraising him as he answered.

"I'm thrilled you'd remember me!" the man said, wagging his tail happily. "I'd decided to myself that I must thank you if we were to meet again. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for planting those pumpkin seeds. With your efforts, the lives of countless beastmen were saved," he continued, bowing his head deeply towards me. "We stopped at rest stops here and there on the way back to the imperial capital, but I saw many people who had been suffering from starvation carefully carrying their pumpkins home."

Apparently, the people had shared their pumpkins with other villagers. The dog-eared man happily recalled how they'd split their pumpkin with him too.

"I cannot thank you enough for saving everyone from starvation."

Lord Royz had thanked me, and even given me a commendation, but none of it had really hit home. But hearing gratitude from someone who had actually seen the starving people made me realize that I'd really helped someone, and I could feel a warmth rise in my chest.

"Everyone carries a seed from one of the pumpkins they ate as a charm now," the man said, showing me a pumpkin seed attached to the Spirit Tree shard he had on a necklace.

Lord Glen stayed quiet, but gave me a gentle smile as he rubbed my back. I was so embarrassed that I couldn't get a good response out, but the dog-eared man left with a smile nonetheless.

2. Shopping

I was told by Lord Royz and Lord Glen that they needed to have an important chat with each other. In the meantime, I went out to shop in the imperial capital, accompanied by Miss Micah and Rene in her Spirit form. Usually, Ele would have come with me too, but he went off on his own. He'd said there was no need for him to go if Rene was with me.

"We can take our time shopping since you've extended your stay," Rene said, as we stepped out of the carriage onto the main road. From there, we started walking.

Since we were shopping together today, she was in her humanoid Spirit form. Apparently, she always stayed in her bird form while at the castle, but used her Spirit form for walking around the city or in towns. She stood out like a sore thumb with her blazing red hair and eyes, catching the gazes of everyone we passed.

"I'm excited to see what the capital has," I said, clenching both my fists tightly. Both Rene and Miss Micah gave me a smile.

The Spirit Tree Bracelet on my left wrist was connected to my personal storage room in the Spirit World, with Spirits managing it. I could put most anything I wanted inside, but I'd been asked to avoid putting items that could spoil, if at all possible. Thanks to my storage though, I'd been going out to buy sweets, which I would then store inside. Whenever we would have a rest break during our travels, I'd share the sweets with everyone.

"There've always been lots of people selling dry fruit in Radzuel's imperial capital~"

"The number of shops selling baked goods like cookies and biscuits has grown as well."

"Both of those sound promising..."

While I fretted about being unable to eat them all if I bought too many, Miss Micah grinned at me.

"Let's just look and see them, first~!" she said, linking arms with me. She headed east to the central main street, nearly tugging me along.

When we arrived, I saw lots of different vendors lined up. *There's dried and smoked meats, tea, fruits, a sweets vendor making treats with red bean paste, and a bulk-candy shop...* Everywhere I looked, there were customers chatting with the shopkeepers. The loudness of all the

haggling and chatter happening caught me off guard though.

“Here we are~” Miss Micah cried, letting go of my arm.

We had stopped at a specialty fruit stall that had a number of big wooden boxes filled with different types of dried fruits.

“Welcome! Our shop prides itself on its selection! Please, take a look!” the shop lady said, giving us a smile as she explained what each box of fruit was. “From the edge, we have grapes, apricots, figs, mikan, peaches, thorn apples, strawberries, tomatoes...”

There were so many options that I lost track halfway through.

“Wh-Which should I buy?” I stammered.

“You can put a few of each into the same bag if you’d like!” the shop lady responded.

“You mean we can mix and match?” I asked, getting a nod back.

“It’s fun not knowing what you’re gonna pull out when you put all the flavors together~!” Miss Micah chimed in, her tail wagging.

“That does sound fun.”

And so, I ended up buying two bags full of a few of every fruit. Since dried fruit can be kept for a long time, we’d be able to eat them bit by bit with everyone. *I hope they like them...* I thought, sending the bags of fruit to my storage in the Spirit World.

“Next we’re headed for the baked sweets shop I recommended!” cried Rene, linking arms and pulling me along just as Miss Micah had before.

This time, we went north from the market, towards a street of colorful shops. Beside the red-brick bakery was a clothing store covered in blue tiles, and next to that was an accessory workshop with pitch-black walls and a golden sign.

“They’re all so brightly colored...” I murmured, looking around in surprise.

“As of late, two people with a peculiar Skill have appeared at the same time. They’re able to change the color of objects at will, and they’ve been feuding by coloring all the buildings around here. They have the owners’ permission, of course, but...it’s all a bit blinding,” replied Rene with a wry smile.

She was right. *All of this is really hard on the eyes...*

Taking care to only look at softer colors, we made our way down the street. After a while, we arrived at our destination: the baked sweets shop. The walls of the shop around the door were dark brown, while the rest of it was yellow.

“It looks like...a sunflower?” I wondered, saying the first thing that came to my mind.

Rene nodded. “Correct. The owner apparently loves sunflowers!”

Satisfied with her reply, I opened the door. I was relieved to see that inside was much tamer, with wooden shades and earthy tones.

“Welcome. Ah, Lady Rene... You’ve brought friends with you?” asked the droopy-eyed horse-eared shopkeeper, a smile on her face.

“I thought this was the perfect place for baked sweets, so I brought them along,” Rene answered, letting go of my arm.

“Oh, how nice of you to say that! I’ll give you some extras,” said the shopkeeper happily. Unlike the shopkeeper’s greeting smile, her second was bashful.

“Now, Lady Chelsea, take your pick!”

Urged on by Rene, I looked around the shop. *Madeleines, financiers, pound cake absolutely stuffed with fruit, apple and lemon pies, tarte tatin, biscotti, galettes, cookies...* All I saw were sweets in every direction.

“Whatever should I choose...” I whispered, overwhelmed by the selection.

“My recommendation is the nut-filled cookies,” Rene said, beaming. She pointed to a shelf near the entrance.

The dough had been mixed with crushed nuts, and the cookies had even more nuts on top, making them just as nutty as their name would suggest. *They look delicious! But there are so many other delicious-looking things too.*

Since I was still undecided on what to choose, the shopkeeper gave me her recommendation next.

“I would suggest the biscotti—freshly baked today,” she said.

If I recall correctly, biscotti is a sweet that’s baked twice to dry out, and stays good for up to a month. They are a bit hard, but they fill you up.

After much deliberation, I bought two bags each of Rene’s suggested nut-filled cookies and the shopkeeper’s recommendation of biscotti—plus two bags each of madeleines and financiers.

I might have bought too much... I ended up buying so many since they all looked so delicious. Can I even eat all of this...? I wondered to myself, looking down at the big paper bag I was holding. It was full of the baked goods I’d bought just a moment before, but I’d also gotten dried fruits before that. *The dried fruits and biscotti will last for a good while, but the rest...* Even if I ate them with everyone, they might spoil before we finished them off.

“What should I do...?”

“Is something the matter?” Rene tilted her head, confused. I hadn’t realized I’d said my last thought out loud.

“I was just thinking about how the sweets might go bad before we finish eating them all,” I said, explaining my trouble.

Rene smiled. “If you have extra, why not give them to the Spirits who take care of your storage room? For them, food from the human world is a great treat.”

Oh, I didn’t know that! I thought. Nodding, I said, “I’ll do that,

since they're always such a help."

I took out one of the bags with nut-filled cookies and held it up.

"Please, share these among yourselves, Storage Spirits."

When I said that, the bag of cookies vanished. My Spirit Tree Bracelet glittered for a moment, so they must have been happy. After that, I willed them to store my big paper bag as well.

Returning to the main street in the center of the imperial capital, we boarded the carriage that had been waiting for us. As we thought back on what had happened on the market and main street, a tiny light flew out of my Spirit Tree Bracelet. Miss Micah didn't seem bothered, so she must not have seen it.

On the other hand, Rene was a Spirit, and thus *did* see it, and murmured, "Hm?"

The little light circled the inside of the carriage for a while before stopping on the back of my hand.

«Hewwo, Lady Chelsea! The Storage Spirits have a message for yew! 'Thank yew for the cookies, they were delishus,' they said!» The little Communication Spirit, only visible as a faint light, gave me a message from the Storage Spirits.

"I'm glad they enjoyed them," I whispered back quietly, giving it a smile.

Having heard me, Miss Micah gave me a confused look.

I pointed to the light on the back of my hand, and explained, "The Communication Spirit came out to say they thanked me."

She stared at the back of my hand for a moment, then smiled. "Such a good kid, coming to say thanks~!"

Since the Communication Spirit was the weakest and lowest-rank Spirit that could appear in our world, only other Spirits and I could see it. According to the little Spirit, its voice could be heard by other people if it really tried, but it would prefer not to do so because it was so taxing. It sparkled a bit, seemingly thrilled that Miss Micah complimented it.

While Miss Micah and I were having that little conversation, Rene was thinking out loud to herself. "Low-ranked Spirits usually act freely and ignore instructions—even those from higher-ranked Spirits—unless patiently taught or threatened... I never expected to see one so obedient..."

«I'm not obedient!» the Communication Spirit complained, glittering fiercely from its spot on the back of my hand.

I nodded in agreement. "The Communication Spirit is only acting this way because it's thinking of me. I'm not making it do anything," I concurred.

Rene looked at the Spirit closely. "You care about Lady Chelsea,

little one?" she questioned in a tone that sounded as if she was checking something.

«Of course!» The little Spirit flickered. «Someday she's gonna give me a name!»

"Give you...a name?" I repeated.

"When a Spirit is given a name by someone important to them, their rank rises dramatically. They become able to stay in this world longer, and are able to do more things. It means a lot for Spirits."

"I see. Then I'll need to give you a name as soon as possible..." I said. *I have to think of a good one... What should I call it?*

Just as I was about to start thinking, Rene shook her head.

"You've no need to rush. There's also a condition that must be met for you to name it."

"What sort of condition?" I asked, tilting my head.

The Communication Spirit answered in Rene's place. «In exchange for giving me a name, I grant a wish for you!»

"So, basically...I need to also decide what I want to wish for?" I mused. *Now I'll have to think of a wish on top of a name...*

"Since it must be something that a little Spirit can grant, you needn't think too hard on it."

Despite Rene's words, I still couldn't come up with anything. Rene, Miss Micah, and I chatted about various names and wishes the entire way back to the castle, but we never settled on anything.

Interlude 1: Glen and Royz

While Chelsea, Micah, and Rene were out on their fun shopping trip, I was invited to Royz's office. There was a sofa for guests and a low table inside, just like my office back in Chronowize. I walked over and sat down on the sofa, facing Royz. Soon after, Lord Royz motioned for the others in the room to leave.

"So, what's this important business?" I asked once the room had been cleared. Ever since we'd realized that we were both reincarnators, we'd become close enough to talk casually.

"Nah, first I've gotta show you this," he said, smirking. He pulled a bottle filled with liquid and two glasses from his Item Box and set them on the table.

I immediately used my [Appraisal] Skill on the liquid. The result showed it was undiluted Japanese sake, made from rice produced in the Radzuel Empire.

"S-Sake...?!" I was so shocked that I stuttered, getting a guffaw from Royz.

"We've only begun to distribute it around the Empire. Can ya drink?"

"Damn right I can drink!" I declared, unable to mask my joy. "I never thought I'd see Japanese sake in another world."

Royz flashed a grin, then pulled a little magic burner and grill plus some dried fish fin out of his Item Box.

"Are those...stingray fins?" I asked, not even appraising them.

The dragonman nodded. "Japanese sake and grilled stingray fins. Ain't that a treat, eh?"

It was my turn to nod this time. We lit the magic burner and set the torn pieces of stingray fin on the grill. Just as the smell of grilled ray fin started circulating around the room, Ele appeared from the window in cat form.

«What is this smell?» Apparently he'd been attracted by the scent.

Royz and I looked at each other before bursting out laughing.

"It's stingray fin, a snack we ate with sake in our past lives."

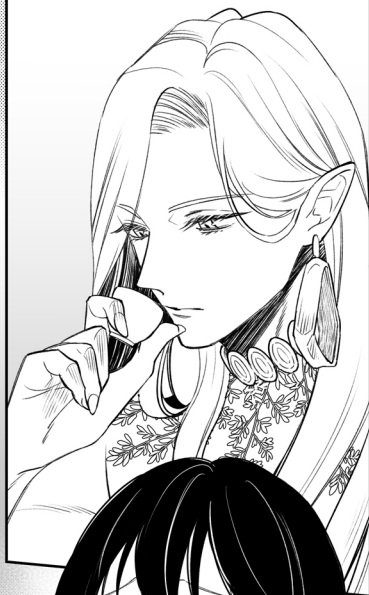
«Sake? You mean this liquid?» the cat-formed Spirit asked, looking between the sake and ray fins.

"Would you like to join us, O King of the Spirits?" Royz asked respectfully.

Ele switched to his Spirit form, seemingly pleased. "All right."

Royz grabbed another glass from the Item Box and served out the sake. After we'd all gotten a piece, we took bites of the stingray fin.

Damn, this flavor takes me back! I thought, looking back at the grill.



"I'd tell you anything, getting entertained like this," I muttered, getting a content look out of the dragonman. After taking a swig of my sake, I then asked, "Now what do you wanna ask about?"

Royz looked off into the distance. "It's not anything serious. I just wanted to know how Micah's been doing over in Chronowize."

I blinked a few times. Micah was Royz's adopted daughter. And wanting to know about how his daughter was doing off on her own meant...

"I never took you for a doting parent."

"Don't say it like that..." he grumbled, slamming down the sake left in his glass in an attempt to hide his embarrassment.

"How Micah's doing, huh..." Other than knowing that she was working as Chelsea's personal chef-slash-maid, I couldn't really think of what else she was doing.

While I was trying to come up with an answer, Ele spoke up. "Micah has been working hard making sweets with Lady Chelsea."

"I see!" Royz said, sounding glad. He poured some more sake into Ele's glass.

"When she has time, she goes to the library and reads books on cooking. I've also seen her go shopping with the other maids."

If that level of info was fine, I had stuff I could say too.

"We had a kitchen built beside Chelsea's room so Micah can cook without bothering anyone. She said it'd let her serve 'piping-hot food.'"

"That'd make her happy, yeah." Royz stared off into the distance, imagining Micah in the kitchen.

No matter how you looked at it, that was the face of a parent worrying for their child, and showed how close the two were.

"But why not ask Micah directly?" Spirit Ele asked, tilting his head.

"I... Uh..."

Since Royz was hesitating, I answered for him while holding back my laughter. "He's— He's embarrassed."

I was right on the money, and the dragonman picked up the bottle of sake and moved away from me.

"No more sake for you, Glen."

"Aw, come on. I'm sorry," I apologized meekly, holding my glass out.

"Eh...screw it. I'll forgive you if you tell me more about what she's been doing," he said, filling my glass with sake.

After that, the three of us chatted until the bottle was empty.

3. The Cutting Branch

Right up until the end of our stay, we spent our time leisurely sightseeing in the imperial capital and nearby cities, getting hands-on agricultural experience, and shopping a few more times. True to Lord Royz's words, the Empire did all it could to entertain us. Since I hadn't expected to spend my time like this, everything was new and fun.

Finally, half a month since we first arrived in Radzuel, the morning of departure came.

After eating breakfast and getting dressed, a knock rang out through my guest room. It was Lord Glen, who had already finished getting ready to depart.

"Let's go to the Radzuel Empire's Spirit Tree first," he said, and I nodded.

The Empire's Spirit Tree was near enough that we could see it from the windows of the castle. After meeting up with Lord Royz, Miss Micah, Ele in cat form, and Rene in bird form, we all headed towards the Spirit Tree together.

The tree was surrounded by a high fence, and military guards patrolled the outside. Lord Royz had also apparently cast magic around the tree and the fence so no one could harm it. And though such measures had been taken to ensure the safety of the tree, many people wanted to see it up close. Due to this, a system was set up where those who went through a background check and paid an admission fee were allowed to approach the base of the tree. Since we didn't really want many people to see what we were doing, we'd reserved it for our exclusive use while we were there.

We entered the fenced-in area one by one, starting with Lord Royz, then Rene in her bird form and Ele in his cat form, then me, Lord Glen, and finally Miss Micah. Since the area inside wasn't all that big, we had our guardian knights and the military guards wait outside of the fence.

After we all stood in front of the tree, Ele changed from his cat form to his Spirit form. His long silver hair nearly reached the ground, and adorning his ears were a pair of Spirit Tree leaf-shaped earrings. He also wore an ornate necklace that looked as if it would make a jingling sound... It had been a while since I'd last seen him in his Spirit form, but he looked divine. And I meant "divine" literally since he wasn't actually human.

“Wait for a moment,” Ele told us before disappearing into the Spirit Tree’s trunk. It almost looked like he got sucked into it.

“How does that work?” Lord Royz wondered, stretching forth a hand towards the tree. Upon reaching the trunk, everything up to his wrist disappeared. Smirking, he started repeatedly putting his hand in and out. “This is fun.”

«You’re my contractor after all, Lord Royz. Contractors can travel through the Spirit Tree.»

“Oh yeah, that’s right. So other than that, only people who get your permission can go through?” he asked Rene in her bird form.

«Yes. After what happened with the Spirit Tree of Origin, we haven’t given anyone else permission.»

Hearing that, Lord Glen looked like he was pondering something.

“Can I test and see if I can go through?” he asked Lord Royz. He must have been asking first since it was Radzuel’s Spirit Tree.

“I don’t think you’d do any harm—and also, I wanna see if that Skill lets you go through, so go ahead,” the dragonman responded with a nod.

Lord Glen reached his hand out and touched the trunk. All it did was make a tapping noise.

Looking satisfied, he pulled his hand away from the tree. As he did, he muttered to himself, “So you really can’t go through without permission... I thought maybe having the [Reincarnator] Skill would let me...”

“Micah’s gonna try too~”

“Yeah, feel free.”

Miss Micah touched the trunk just as Lord Glen did, but nothing happened.

“Why don’t you try too, Lady Chelsea?”

I gave a big nod back at Lord Royz’s suggestion. I’d actually wanted to try touching it too, so I was happy to take a turn. *Since I have a contract with Ele, the Spirit King, I can probably go through...* But I’d never touched the trunk before. I’d touched—or rather, sat on—the branches before, but would the trunk be different?

“Here I go...!” I said, my heart pounding as I reached my right arm towards the Spirit Tree’s trunk. And just as Lord Royz’s hand had done, my hand also disappeared inside. “Huh? I feel like I’m getting pulled in.”

It felt like something was drawing me in from inside the tree—from inside of the Spirit World.

Seeing this happen, Lord Glen picked me up and stepped away from the tree. Then, he looked intently above my head.

“You’re okay, right?”

“Yes, I’m fine,” I replied, holding out my right hand to show him.

The blue stone of the engagement ring on my ring finger sparkled.

Normally, an engagement ring would go on your left ring finger, but since this ring was a magic tool that would automatically cast defensive magic to protect the wearer from danger, it couldn't be removed easily. Lord Glen had asked me to keep my left ring finger open for my wedding ring, so I wore this ring on my right hand.

«Lady Chelsea is incredibly popular with the higher-ranked Spirits due to being the one who created the Spirit Tree of Origin's seed. I remember them saying that they'd like to bring her to the Spirit World if the chance ever presented itself.» Rene sighed in her bird form before sticking just her head into the Spirit Tree's trunk.

It was a bit scary seeing a headless bright-red bird from the side. Still holding me in his arms, Lord Glen turned away so that I wouldn't see.

Wait, he never let go of me!

After I quietly asked him to put me down, he smiled wryly before setting me down on the ground. While we were doing that, Rene had apparently pulled her head back out.

«I never expected that anyone would be so rude as to try to bring Lady Chelsea to the Spirit World without her consent. I gave them a good talking-to, so everything is fine now!» she said, spreading her wings wide.

A few moments later, Ele reappeared, holding a wooden box.

“I've brought the cutting,” he said, handing it to me.

Once I had accepted it, and ensured it wouldn't be dropped, he transformed from his divine Spirit form into his silver-furred cat form. Then, he hopped onto the box in my arms.

«As I will be starting to use my magic, I leave the rest to you.»

“I'll be careful with it,” I replied, giving him a nod.

Ele would have to be constantly casting his magic on the cutting inside the box to keep it from drying out or being damaged until we made it to the Martec Republic and planted it. *We've got to do that as soon as possible!*

“Now, let me take you guys to the Martec Republic's border, just like I promised. We'll be heading back to the castle first.”

We all nodded at Lord Royz's words and exited the Spirit Tree's fenced area. After grouping back up with our guardian knights and the military personnel, we returned to the castle. Once back, we moved to the large garden where the commendation ceremony and party had been held. There, we saw two large boxes about the size of ten-seater carriages, with windows and a door on each. One was for our guardian knights to ride, while the other was for us.

“The palanquin that Lady Chelsea's group'll be riding in is specially outfitted with soft carpets and big cushions, so no shoes

allowed!" announced Lord Royz with a smile. He opened the door of one box—or rather, palanquin—to show us the inside. I could see shaggy carpets and huge, soft-looking cushions.

"Thank you so very much," I said, taking my shoes off at the door before boarding. The shag carpeting was even softer than I'd imagined, and every step I took sunk into it a little bit. "Wow... It's so fluffy!"

While I had fun walking around and feeling the carpet, Lord Glen and Miss Micah boarded as well.

Once the door closed, I could see Rene in her bird form outside of the window. Since she would be protecting the imperial capital in Lord Royz's stead, we'd be parting here.

«Take care, Lady Chelsea! I'll send you letters!»

"I'll send you letters too... Bye-bye!" I said out the open window before she flew off. I remembered that I'd mentioned in my letters that I didn't like being seen off, since it made me feel lonely.

Looking through the window into the guard knight's palanquin, I saw that it was outfitted with comfortable-looking sofas inside. They probably hadn't put carpet inside because it was harder for the knights to take off their boots. I was happy that Lord Royz's hospitality had extended that far.

Once the knights had all boarded, Lord Royz transformed. His pitch-black scale-covered body was long like a snake, with a deep-green mane like a horse. He had arms and legs in the same spots as they would be on a lizard, and he had no wings. According to Lord Glen, the reason why he didn't look like dragons from storybooks was because he was a creature known as an "Eastern Dragon."

"Let's go," Lord Royz said, picking up a palanquin in each claw before floating up into the air.

It's so strange how he can fly in the sky without wings...

Looking out of the still-open window, I saw that we were quickly ascending from the ground. The mountains in the distance were covered in verdant greenery, showing us just how much the Radzuel Empire had recovered from the miasma. As we took to the sky, cold air started entering the palanquin, and I quickly closed the windows.

Since I'd already enjoyed the view, I decided to try sitting on the big cushions that Lord Royz had prepared for us. Lord Glen and Miss Micah were already sitting on their cushions and relaxing. I followed their lead and sat down, only to be engulfed. Since I was holding the wooden box too, I wouldn't be able to stand back up easily.

While I sat surprised, Lord Glen smiled at me.

"I'll help you get up when you need to, so just relax for now," he said.

"All right."

After nodding back to him, the three of us started reminiscing about what had happened during our visit to Radzuel. Like how I'd had a commendation ceremony held for me and received both a title and a book, about Lord Glen and Lord Royz's fun night of drinking together, and how much being expected to act like a princess bothered Miss Micah. Silly things like that.

"Oh yeah, have you read the book you were given yet?"

I nodded in response to Lord Glen's question. "Yes, I've finished reading through it, so now I'm rereading the pages that interested me."

The book on plants, written in a language only beastmen could read, was full of information on vegetation native only to the Radzuel Empire. The writings contained information on delicious-looking fruits as well, so I wanted to make the seeds for them someday.

While I was thinking to myself, I heard soft snores nearby. Looking over, I saw Miss Micah was snoozing away.

"We did wake up early, huh..." I murmured, yawning myself.

"We're still a good ways away from the border, so we might as well nap."

Nodding in agreement, I closed my eyes, and quickly drifted off to sleep.

+ + +

During the journey, we took breaks at various places along the way. We finally reached our destination, a town near the border, a little after lunchtime.

Lord Royz lowered the palanquins down outside town, and we put our shoes back on, then exited in the same order we'd gotten in. Thanks to how smooth a ride it had been, I was able to walk steadily once I was out. *Lord Royz must've been really careful.* After making sure that we were all out—including the guard knights—he put the palanquins back in his Item Box, and transformed back into his humanoid form.

A thin, horse-eared man came running out towards us from the town proper.

"Welcome, everyone!" he greeted us. "I am the mayor of this fine town."

"Everything I left with you is safe, I assume?" Lord Royz asked.

"Yes, of course!" The mayor nodded. "Please, come this way!"

Following him, we were led towards the town square. And as we walked closer, I saw a carriage I recognized.

"Isn't that the carriage we usually use?" I asked.

Lord Royz smirked in response to my words. "I brought the carriage you guys were using here in hospitality. Best to stick with

what you're used to riding, right?"

The carriages we'd taken to Radzuel from Chronowize had a variety of spells cast on them to make the ride smoother. I was shocked. I never imagined that the carriages we'd left in the imperial capital would end up out here on the border to the Martec Republic.

"I really appreciate this. It's specially made, after all," Lord Glen said with a smile.

Now that I was getting a better look, I realized that the horses pulling the carriage were the same ones we'd brought from Chronowize. Even the horses intended for the guards were the same too. They whinnied happily when they noticed their owners were approaching them.

"It kind of seems as if the horses are in even better shape than the last time we saw them," I commented, seeing how much shinier their coats were, and how happy they looked.

The mayor puffed his chest out proudly. "Us horsemen can understand horses, so we knew exactly what they wanted."

Ah, the people of the town were taking good care of them until we arrived. I was happy to hear that.

"So, how was our country as a host?" asked Lord Royz, looking nervous, after we'd seen the carriages and horses.

Taking a moment to think, Lord Glen then chuckled and said, "Two words. The best."

The dragonman heaved a sigh of relief before turning to me this time.

"I was very happy to be treated so well," I said, smiling.

The guest rooms were extravagant, but still warm and easy to relax in. And the maids were not only conscientious, but also fun to talk to. We enjoyed being taken sightseeing to various places—from the imperial capital to farms. They had also treated our guards well, and had our carriages and horses brought to the border and taken care of. Just thinking about all they'd done for us made my chest warm.

Seeing my expression, Lord Royz gave a satisfied smile back.

4. The Martec Republic

After saying goodbye to Lord Royz, we got inside our carriage and headed towards the border gate. Standing there was a guard shorter than me, with a bounty of facial hair.

“What a wonderful beard you have,” I commented, looking closely at his long bushy beard. It was clearly groomed and well taken care of.

The guard gave me a huge smile and said, “Oho? Missy, could this be your first time meeting a dwarf?”

“Yes, I’ve never met one of your kind before,” I replied with a nod.

“Us dwarven men all take *very* good care of our beards, so getting a compliment like that makes me over the moon. Thank you kindly!” the dwarven guard said, quickly going over our travel documents and letting us through.

“The Martec Republic is where not only dwarves, but elves and also kyewts live, right?” I asked Lord Glen, as the carriage carried us past the border gate. I’d learned about which races lived in which countries back in the Sargent Margraviate.

“Yep. Those are the three main resident races,” he said, smiling, before giving a simple explanation of their traits. “Dwarves are good at metalwork with precious metals, as well as smithing. And lately, they’ve been getting into making magical tools. Physically, they’re shorter than humans, have pointy ears, and their men always grow beards once they come of age—just like that guard back there. Other than that, most of them are strong and muscular, regardless of gender.” He bent his arm and pointed to his biceps.

“Most dwarves are true artisans, and hard to please. That guard was a weird one~! Oh yeah, and they all love stroooooong liquor,” Miss Micah chimed in. Before Lord Royz had become emperor, he had taken her to travel the continent together, so she was likely speaking from experience.

“Elves are good with leather making and woodworking, and have apparently been working with woolen goods as of late. They’re taller than humans, with the same kind of pointy ears as dwarves. Most of them have light-colored hair like yours, Chelsea, and well-proportioned faces. Beautiful ones, even.”

“Elves don’t usually panic or get angry~ They’re all gentle~ Oh,

but they drink liquor like it's water~!"

Beautiful and gentle... So like Lord Glen? But Lord Glen has dark hair, so I won't have to worry about getting them mixed up.

"Now, kyewts are good at dancing, singing, playing instruments...anything related to music. They're shrewd salesmen though, and physically shorter than dwarves. They've got long, pointed ears, and most of them have big eyes too."

"If the elves are beautiful, then the kyewts are cute~! Also, they really like sweet liquor~!"

So all three races have pointy ears and like drinking...

Lord Glen nodded along with Miss Micah's explanation, and added, "Basically, a lot of them have bright personalities, and love to sing a lot."

If kyewts are shorter than dwarves like the border guard, that'd mean they might not even come up to my chest.

"So they're small..." I murmured.

«They may be small, but do not underestimate them. They're smooth talkers,» Ele piped up in response from his spot curled up on the wooden box.

"Can I ask you to elaborate?" Lord Glen asked, looking intrigued.

«Dwarves and elves were on very bad terms, back in the day. Both races were skilled craftsmen, so they were in competition with each other. This was why they wanted to establish separate nations for each of them.»

If it was back when nations were being established, wouldn't it be in the age of mythology, when ancient writing was in use? I wondered, thinking back to what I'd been taught about the continent's history.

«The kyewts suggested that the three races should create a country together, where the dwarves work on metal and gems, elves on leather and woodworking, and kyewts on selling the goods. And so, the Martec Republic was established.»

"Wow, that's hard to imagine, considering how close the dwarves and elves are nowadays," Lord Glen replied.

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It took fifteen days for our carriage to reach the Martec Republic's capital from the border. We rode along the highway, and stayed at inns we came across. We didn't have any accidents, or attacks by bandits or monsters on the way. That said, there was one thing that really stood out to me.

"It almost seems as if there's less greenery the closer we get to the capital..." I said quietly, as our carriage rocked along.

Lord Glen nodded. "All this withered vegetation definitely seems unnatural."

Back just past the border, the mountains were covered in verdant trees. But about ten days after going through the border gate, we began to notice more and more dead trees mixed in. I had thought it was only my imagination, but the closer we came to the capital, the worse things got. Now, fourteen days in, with only a day left until we reached the capital, there were absolutely no live trees to be seen on the mountains, and not a stalk of grass growing either.

On the tenth day in, when we'd stopped at an inn, I'd asked the elven owner about the trees. She'd told me that they'd been withering for the past few years despite getting adequate rainfall. I recounted this for Lord Glen, and his gaze moved out the window.

"I can't see the appraisal results of the mountains from here, but I tried appraising the dead fields right there... Apparently, the entire area is having a 'mana drought.'"

People used the mana in their mana pools for Skills and magic, and this mana would regenerate by doing things like eating or sleeping. There was an illness known as Mana Deficiency Disease where sufferers would be unable to keep any mana in their pool, and would eventually weaken and die due to lack of mana. *But what's happening to the land?* I thought, tilting my head.

Lord Glen explained, "It isn't quite understood how yet, but things like thunder, storms, earthquakes, and wildfires use up mana in the air, water, and earth. Then, the mana naturally recovers after a few days."

"So you mean to say that there's a mana drought because the land can't naturally recover mana?"

"That's what I'm thinking, yeah."

Mana Deficiency Disease can be cured using the Elixir Seed I'd created. Would I be able to heal the land's mana drought by also making a seed?

While I was wondering that, Lord Glen continued, "Since we don't know why the drought is happening, just pouring mana into the land to try to fix things would only end up a temporary solution. Save your seed-creating for once we know the cause, okay?"

"Huh?! How did you know what I was thinking?" I asked, shocked.

He chuckled. "It was written all over your face. I could tell just from one look at you."

Am I really that obvious? I hid my face behind my hands.

Lord Glen's expression turned serious, and he turned to look out the window again. "Even if you did make a seed, we'd have to get permission to plant it, since this is a foreign country."

I nodded in understanding. Since we needed to get permission to plant a Spirit Tree cutting, we'd also need permission to plant any

seeds created to deal with the mana drought.

And so, the next day, we reached the Martec Republic's capital. The city was surrounded by a moat, with drawbridges built in the four cardinal directions in order to let people inside. Apparently, they were pulled up at night, making it so no one could enter then. In the middle was a tower-like castle, where the delegates from each region of the Republic would gather.

We entered from the eastern drawbridge and headed towards the castle. As our carriage stopped outside of it, we were met by many men and women of all ages.

In the very middle of the group was a kyewt woman. As I stepped out of the carriage behind Lord Glen, she raised both of her arms.

"Welcome to the Martec Republic!" she proclaimed.

At her signal, the rest of the people raised their arms as well. It seemed to be a Martec-style greeting.

"It's wonderful to meet you. I am the Republic's chief representative, Lilibreina."

Chief Representative Lilibreina had her bright-green hair down, and wore a skirt that stopped above the knee. This was coupled with thigh-high boots, along with a long coat that went down to her ankles. Back in Chronowize, showing your thighs was considered vulgar, so her style of dress was a shock to me. But being a kyewt, she was the same height as a child. Despite coming up to under my chest, her clothes didn't look odd on her at all.

The other representatives of the Republic were standing behind Lady Lilibreina, and though they didn't introduce themselves, they all gave us a little bow and a smile. The representatives consisted of dwarves, elves, and kyewts, and had equal numbers of men and women. *I wonder if there's any reason they have an equal amount of people like this.*

Taking the lead, Lord Glen introduced himself. "I am Glenarnold Snowflake, younger brother to the King of Chronowize."

Following him, I said, "My name is Chelsea Sargent, and I am a research fellow from Chronowize's Royal Research Institute."

After our introductions, Lady Lilibreina gave me an adorable, childlike smile. *She's so cute and small!* I glanced back towards Miss Micah behind me, and saw her tail wagging fervently. *She must be feeling the urge to give Lady Lilibreina a big hug too.*

"I cannot thank you enough for agreeing to our proposal to plant a cutting of the Spirit Tree," said Lord Glen.

Lady Lilibreina raised both her hands again. "We've heard that the Radzuel Empire has become well-off after having a cutting planted. Just as we were thinking that we'd like to be blessed with a cutting as

well, Your Highness's request arrived... We should be thanking you. We'll have you plant the cutting immediately, and tonight we will throw a grand celebratory party!" she said, gesturing towards the south.

As soon as she did, the other representatives who met with us all cheered.

"Our country will become abundant as well!"

"We'll be blessed by the Spirit Tree!"

"Let's get it planted already so we can party!"

No one was speaking up against us planting the cutting. In fact, most of them seemed glad. It was relieving to have such a warm welcome here.

"Please, allow me to show you to the location we'd like the cutting to be planted in..."

Following Lady Lilitreina's instructions, we once again boarded our carriage, heading towards the south part of the capital.

"I didn't expect we'd be planting it before we got a chance to rest," Lord Glen commented with a bitter smile as we rode.

«I am...all for planting the cutting as soon as possible,» said Ele, sounding exhausted. He'd been casting his magic constantly over our fifteen-day journey.

Just hold out a little bit longer, okay? I thought, giving the cat-shaped Spirit a gentle pet.

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After crossing the southern drawbridge, then heading along the highway for a while, our carriage came to a stop. Lord Glen helped me get out, as Lady Lilitreina and the other representatives had already arrived before us.

"We've prepared a spot over there," she said, pointing to a spot a little bit off of the highway.

There, I could see a vast wilderness, and a mountain range in the distance. It must have been really far away, because there were still bits of green on the mountains.

"The sacred bird who protects children has lived in those mountains for ages," Lady Lilitreina said, noticing my fixated gaze. "Our sacred bird is incredibly wise, and saves good children who are attacked by monsters."

"What about...the not-good children?" I whispered quietly.

Lady Lilitreina giggled. "It doesn't save any bad children, of course! That's why we tell our children that they have to be good."

So it doesn't save them too? I thought to myself in shock as I walked. In the distance, I noticed a staked-off section.

“We’ve heard that Spirit Trees grow quite large. This location has few obstructions, and should have enough space to let it grow nice and big. Now, if you’d please,” Lady Lilireina said, holding out her hands.

«It will be fine.» Ele nodded, looking over the encircled zone from his spot on the wooden box.

“The area is still under a mana drought, but it should be big enough,” Lord Glen said, nodding along with Ele.

I adjusted the wooden box in my arms, and spoke to both Lord Glen and Miss Micah, who had been behind me, “I’ll be going then.”

Lord Glen gave me his usual gentle smile, while Miss Micah gave a little wave.

Then, I headed to the center of the staked-off area with Ele and the wooden box. Lord Glen, Lady Lilireina, Miss Micah, our guard knights, and all of the other representatives watched intently from outside.

Trying to calm my nerves, I announced to everyone there, “I will now be planting the Spirit Tree cutting.”

Lady Lilireina clenched both her fists, looking as excited as a child would be. The other representatives looked just as excited. Lord Glen and Miss Micah nodded their heads. The guard knights, however, didn’t move a muscle.

Taking my words as a signal, Ele jumped off the top of the wooden box and landed on the ground. I slowly took the cover off and pulled out the rod-shaped Spirit Tree branch from inside.

Seeing the branch glitter like glass, the representatives started to chatter. *Well, it looks just like a glass rod, after all.* A strained smile rose to my face as I willed my Spirit Tree Bracelet to take the wooden box and store it for me.

Then, I held the glass rod-looking Spirit Tree branch in both my hands and thrust it down into the ground. It shimmered for a moment, growing up to about my waist before stopping.

That’s strange... When I’d planted the cutting in Radzuel, the branch had shone so bright that you couldn’t even open your eyes, and had grown to about the same height as the second floor of the Royal Research Institute in an instant.

While I stood there perplexed, I heard cheers from the group of representatives behind me.

“Now the Martec Republic will become bountiful again!”

“The dried-up land will go back to normal!”

Thinking back, didn’t Lady Lilireina say something about Radzuel becoming bountiful again after their cutting had been planted? But Spirit Trees just keep the miasma away. They don’t make countries bountiful...do they?

As I thought that, a human man appeared from the group of representatives. Since the Martec Republic's representatives were all dwarves, elves, and kyewts, a human among them seemed out of place. *Was he always with them?*

"The one who will return prosperity to this land is Her Lady the Proxy, not the Spirit Trees!" he shouted.

A large group of men in black clothing suddenly appeared from behind the representatives and attacked. The representatives all screamed, scattering as fast as they could.

"Protect the tree!" Lady Lilireina yelled. She'd been knocked on her bottom and couldn't move, but she had the presence of mind to say that.

Lord Glen used his magic to knock back the men who headed to attack her.

I need to do something too! I thought, taking out my big Venus flytrap seed and throwing it to the ground. It sprouted in an instant, spreading its five leaves across the staked area to protect me.

"I will not allow you to harm either the Spirit Tree or Lady Chelsea!" Ele suddenly transformed from cat to Spirit, hitting the men who tried to enter the staked-off area with lightning.

Thanks to the guard knights, Lord Glen, and Ele fighting, the number of men in black was quickly dwindling. Miss Micah was protecting Lady Lilireina too, routing any enemies who got close.

Just a few more! The second I thought that, something that cast a huge shadow passed overhead.

"CAAAAWWWW!"

I looked up to see a huge blue bird hurtling straight for me. It grabbed me before I could even make a sound, and quickly flew back high into the air.

"Chelsea!" I could hear Lord Glen scream my name.

"Lord...Glen!" I cried, managing to squeeze the words out as I reached towards him—but he just looked at the sky, seemingly unable to see me. He grew smaller and smaller, and I blanked out.



Interlude 2: Glen

“The one who will return prosperity to this land is Her Lady the Proxy, not the Spirit Trees!”

Immediately after Chelsea planted the cutting, several men in black appeared and attacked us.

“Protect the tree!” yelled Lilitreina, the Martec Republic’s chief representative, having been knocked down. Her cry brought her to the men’s attention, and they headed towards the tree with blades drawn.

“Icicle Lance...”

Using magic, I summoned a spear of ice and rammed it into the men in black, knocking them out. Then, I immediately used my [Appraisal] Skill on them. Their class was “Believer of the Proxy,” and they had the “Ash of the Spirit Tree of Origin” blessing, which allowed them to teleport and transfer things. Since they were blessed, I used magic to make sure that everyone in my line of sight couldn’t teleport.

“Shutdown...”

And with that, the enemy wouldn’t be able to flee anymore. With that concern out of the way, I used another spell on another group of men in black.

“Gust of Wind...” I cast, knocking the men far away.

The men who had attacked Chelsea and the Spirit Tree back in Chronowize’s capital had the class “Worshiper of the Proxy, Driven by Envy.” Both that and “Believer of the Proxy” included “the Proxy” in them, so they had to be connected to *her*. And if they were connected to the Proxy, that meant that there was a chance they’d attack Chelsea.

I’d given Chelsea a magic ring that would automatically cast defensive magic if she was in danger. If the men did attack her, they’d just get blown away, leaving her unharmed. Despite knowing this though, I couldn’t help but worry about my fiancée, and my gaze automatically snapped to her. She’d planted her huge Venus flytrap seed for self-defense.

Nice one, Chelsea. She’d thought of what she could do, and done it. Maybe it was the Sargent Margraviate’s blood running through her veins, with their years of experience fighting monsters, that let her know what to do without being told. It was more proof that she’d grown. I couldn’t help but smile at that.

“I will not allow you to harm either the Spirit Tree or Lady

Chelsea!” Ele had changed back into his Spirit form, and began throwing lightning about. With both him and her huge Venus flytrap protecting her, Chelsea would be fine.

I just need to defeat all the men in black quickly to reassure her.

Deciding that to myself, I looked towards the outside of the staked-off area and threw another spell at the men. Thanks to Micah and the guardian knights, we had nearly defeated them all.

I need to focus now more than ever, since there’s not many left. But just as I thought that, I heard a bird cry above us.

“CAAAAWWWW! (A child is in danger!)”

Thanks to my [Reincarnator] Skill, I could understand the words of monsters and animals. *If the bird is talking about children—or rather, someone underage—Chelsea is the only one who fits the bill here.*

I quickly began to rush to her side, but the men in black got in my way. I very briefly took my eyes off her to knock the men out, but in that time, the huge blue bird above had already grabbed her in its claws, and was flying away.

“Chelsea!”

“Lord...Glen!”

As I looked up, Chelsea and the huge blue bird blurred out of sight. It was probably hiding itself to make it impossible to appraise or track. And if I couldn’t see it, I couldn’t trap it with a barrier or give chase. On another note, since I’d already cast magic stopping any teleportation, the bird had to have flown away on its own wings.

However...

“How the hell did it get through the defensive magic...?” I could practically hear my rational sense snap at the unexpected event. “Bind...”

I cast the binding spell over everyone in my field of vision: men in black, Martec representatives—even Lilitreina, their chief representative. None of them could move a muscle.

“Wh-Why would you bind us too?!” screeched an elven man, one of the representatives.

“The men in black’s timing was awfully convenient, don’t you think? It’s obvious someone was working with them.”

When I said that, the elven man looked away. Normally, I wouldn’t pull anything that could start an international incident like casting binding magic on diplomats—even if there was a traitor among them. But right now, I wasn’t as composed as I normally was either.

“Who *took* Chelsea? Who’s controlling that huge bird?” I asked everyone I’d bound, and all of them shook their heads.

I used [Appraisal] on the entire group, but none of them were shaken or panicking. It seemed those present weren’t lying. That

meant that whoever took Chelsea wasn't related to anyone here.
What's going on?

As I scowled to myself, Lilitreina spoke. "That was our sacred bird, protector of the children... It's not something anyone can control."

Now that I thought back a bit, the bird *had* cried out that a child was in trouble. *So the huge bird—or rather, the sacred bird—is completely unrelated to the men in black, and had taken Chelsea in an attempt to protect her?* That also explained why her defensive magic hadn't kicked in.

"So, where did it take her, then?" I muttered.

Ele, still in his Spirit form, was the one to answer. "I am able to sense Lady Chelsea's location, so we should focus on settling things here first."

I nodded, then asked Micah to use her [Interrogation] Skill. I proceeded to separate the people against the Spirit Tree from those who meant it no harm, and released the latter group. In the end, we were able to determine that the elven man who had complained about being bound had been the one to bring the men in black.

According to the elf, he'd heard from someone who'd visited Radzuel that the land had actually gotten even worse after the Spirit Tree had been planted. The elven man had told this to the rest of the representatives, but they hadn't quite grasped his intentions. On the contrary, the Spirit Tree-planting plan got approved instead, so he'd had to think of another way he could stop it.

"While I was unsure what to do, that's when I met a man in black. We hit it off, since neither of us wanted the Spirit Tree planted... Before I knew it, the plan to get him in here was set..."

After having confessed everything thanks to Micah's [Interrogation] Skill, the elf's shoulders sank.

Hearing what the man said, Ele spoke up again. "Planting a Spirit Tree cutting would neither help nor harm the land itself. All they would do is allow Spirits to appear and cleanse miasma."

"Huh?!" Lilitreina and the rest of the representatives exclaimed at once.

In reality, the tree's leaves could be used as ingredients in mana potions, the branches to ward off miasma, and the tree itself to enter and exit the Spirit World. But since none of that info should be spread, I kept my mouth shut.

"Then...our country is doomed..." murmured Lilitreina, a serious look on her face.

"Lady Chelsea could heal your lands, however..." Ele said.

Hearing this, the eyes of the representatives widened in surprise.

"Is that true?!" one asked.

I was so taken aback by how they jumped at the idea that I

couldn't help but nod in affirmation.

"Then we must save Lady Chelsea at once!"

Seemingly all on board with the plan of getting Chelsea back, the other representatives told us to leave things to them. After slapping Mana Sealing Bracelets on the men in black and the elf that had helped them, the majority of people present began making their way back to the capital.

Lilireina, Micah, Ele, and I stayed by the tree, and began discussing how we could actually save Chelsea.

"So where's she at~?" Micah asked worriedly. She looked worn out from expending most of her mana using her [Interrogation] Skill.

"Through my contract with her, I sense Chelsea in the direction of that mountain range," answered Ele as he looked towards it.

"According to past children who've been saved by the sacred bird, it has a bed-like roost up in a cave in the center of the mountains. The entrance is hidden with magic, and the children are protected until it's deemed they're safe," Lilireina explained.

"And how long does it take to get there?"

"It's an entire day to the town at the base of the mountain, and another full day on foot to reach the roost. Without breaks to the inner mountains."

So two days... That's not too bad, I suppose, I thought, while getting to my feet.

Micah murmured, "If it was me, I'd stay put and wait for help to arrive. But I wonder if Chelsea would be that patient~?"

"It'd probably be best to tell her to wait at the sacred bird's roost," I replied.

"But how would we tell her that~?" Micah asked in confusion.

"Ele can move between this Spirit Tree sapling here and Chelsea's Spirit Tree Bracelet, can't he?"

For the half-year that Chelsea spent recuperating at the Sargent Margraviate, Ele had traveled between Chronowize's tree and her bracelet to carry letters between us.

But when I brought that up, Ele shook his head and said, "As the tree is still but a sapling, I must continue constantly casting magic to protect it from damage and drying out, just as I did with the cutting. Thus, I cannot leave it."

But that'd mean we can't tell Chelsea to stay put... I thought, furrowing my brow.

Seeing my expression, Ele sighed. "We can ask the Communication Spirit that is fond of Chelsea to do it for us."

As soon as the Spirit King said that, I heard a voice from nowhere. «Did you call me, Your Majestee?»

Speak of the devil, the Communication Spirit had appeared.

Though I could still only hear it, not see it.

“Yes. You’ve come at a good time, Communication Spirit,” Ele said, bringing his right hand closer to his face. “We have a message for Lady Chelsea.”

It seemed the little Spirit had come to rest on Ele’s palm. The Spirit King poked at it with his left index finger.

«A rekwest from the king? Yessum.»

“Tell Lady Chelsea to wait for us. We will be coming to rescue her.”

«Okay. Will do!»

Apparently, the Communication Spirit had disappeared to the Spirit World to relay the message. While we waited for a response, I explained things to Micah and Lilireina, who couldn’t hear the small Spirit. Soon enough, the Spirit returned, bearing a message from Chelsea.

«Here I am! Lady Chelsea says she will be waiting!»

If she was able to send us a message back, that was proof she was safe and sound.

I heaved a sigh of relief. “I want to go and retrieve her immediately since we know she’s okay, but you can’t leave here, right Ele?”

Ele nodded in response to my question.

“Then how are we gonna find Chelsea~?” asked Micah, tilting her head.

The Spirit King gave a little sigh. “As these are extenuating circumstances, I will give Glen the blessing ‘The Spirit’s Guidance.’”

“‘The Spirit’s Guidance?’” I parroted back in confusion.

Transforming back to his cat form, he replied, «As I cannot have others hearing what I am about to say, I will speak in this form.»

When he was a cat, the only people who could understand Ele’s words were those contracted to a Spirit or with the [Reincarnator] Skill. Everyone else just heard meowing.

“Huh? A cat?!” yelped Lilireina in shock, seeing Ele’s transformation.

Micah seemed to catch on to what was happening, so she pulled Lilireina a short distance away to explain that Ele was a Spirit.

«With the blessing of ‘The Spirit’s Guidance,’ you will be able to sense the locations of Spirit Trees, and travel between fully grown trees.»

So I’ll be able to travel between trees? Even the [Reincarnator] Skill didn’t let me do that! While I stood there, eyes wide, Ele continued.

«Your ability to sense the trees is not limited to those planted in the ground. It also includes those that have been made into something else. Thus, you will be able to sense the location of Lady Chelsea’s

Spirit Tree Bracelet.»

“I see...” I said, nodding.

Ele floated up into the air and placed a paw to my forehead. For an instant, I felt as if something warm was flowing into me, then he pulled his paw back.

«Now you will know where Lady Chelsea is.»

Concentrating, I could feel a warm light coming from the mountains to the south. *I can go and get Chelsea back!*

Once we were all prepared, I gathered Micah and the guard knights, then headed towards the southern mountain range.

5. The Sacred Bird Simurgh's Roost

Before I knew it, I'd been grabbed by a huge blue bird and was flying in the sky. Unlike when Lord Royz carried us in the palanquins, this time I was directly in the bird's claws. I couldn't stop shaking, being terrified that I'd fall. *This is so scary!* Closing my eyes tightly, I held on, trying my best not to look down.

I had no idea how long we were flying, but after a while, I realized I'd been let down by the entrance of a cave. *Is this where its roost is?*

I'm free, finally! I thought as I flopped onto the ground. The big blue bird seemed to observe me before bringing its beak close. Since the defensive magic weaved into the ring I wore didn't activate, I could tell that it wasn't trying to harm me. *For a second there, I thought I was going to be eaten... Thankfully, I was wrong.*

As I calmed down, a little light flew out of the Spirit Tree Bracelet on my left wrist.

«Lady Chelsea, are you okay?» the Communication Spirit asked, flying circles around me in worry.

Still laying on the floor, I replied, "I wouldn't really say I'm *okay*, but..."

The big bird was following the Spirit with its eyes. Since it was the lowest rank of Spirits able to manifest in our world, only other Spirits and I could see it. But if the bird could too, then that meant it had to be something close to a Spirit itself.

«Oh, yes. The king gave me a message, Lady Chelsea!» I tilted my head in confusion, and it continued. «Um... 'Stay put, we're on our way.' Or somethin' like that...»

They're coming to save me! Learning this, the tension drained from my body.

"Can you tell them I'll be waiting?" I asked.

The little Communication Spirit's light blinked a couple of times before it disappeared inside of the Spirit Tree Bracelet. A few minutes later, it popped back out again.

«They're happy you're safe!»

The big bird chirped like it was wondering what the two of us were talking about.

«Ima Communication Spiwit! I have no name yet. Who're you?»

"Chirp-chirp chirup."

«Simurgh'!»

Simurgh, the big bird, nodded. It seemed to realize that the Spirit could pass on a message to me, because it continued chirping for a long time.

The Communication Spirit flew around before speaking with great difficulty, «Lady Chelsea is... Um... A very s-s-speshal girl. Simurgh says, you will save the countwy.»

Me? Special? And save the country?

«I'm no good with words I have never heard before. Sowwy,» the Spirit said, sounding sad.

Simurgh frantically moved its wings as if it was trying to comfort the little Spirit, and I couldn't help but giggle.

The sun was setting and things were getting dark, so Simurgh used its beak to push me farther inside of the cave. Since there was luminescent moss growing inside, it was brighter than I expected. The moss illuminated at a touch, so my footsteps glowed as I walked. The Communication Spirit was also glowing, so I made it to the depths of the cave without much problem.

In the innermost part of the cave was a bed-like thing made of blue feathers, about as tall as Simurgh's stomach. Looking at me, the bird gestured to the bed with its wing. As I got closer, the bird began doing sitting motions.

“You want me to sit?”

Simurgh nodded. Once I'd followed its instructions, it looked relieved. Then it turned to exit the cave.

“Since I'll have to wait until I'm rescued, I need to figure out what to do now...” I murmured to myself, as the little Communication Spirit sparkled at me encouragingly. I'd been taught how to be ladylike back in the Sargent Margraviate, but I'd never been taught what to do if I was ever taken away by a huge flying animal.

Getting carried off by a bird probably isn't a very common occurrence, huh? I thought to myself, recalling the most recent events.

At times like this, my experiences from living back in the Eucharis Barony would probably help the most. I'd lived in a shed that could've collapsed at any moment, with only a basic bed and a thin blanket. Compared to that, the bed of blue feathers here looked soft and warm, and I'd probably fall asleep quickly. *I can cross off finding somewhere to sleep from my to-do list, at least.*

Next, I'd need food and water. I could live a few days without eating, but I'd gotten sick and collapsed when I'd gone without water. *That was so terrible... I'll need to find water as soon as possible!*

Fruit Water Seeds would work for keeping me hydrated, but I wanted to be able to wash my face too. That was when I remembered the Water Seeds I'd thought up for knights on expeditions. You could

get a cup of water dripped from the flowers that grew from them. *Which means I'll need a cup.* If I wanted a cup, I just had to make myself something like a Cutlery Seed. Those were seeds that would grow and bloom into a fork, knife, and spoon.

"I'll make a seed that grows into fruit shaped like tableware—[Seed Creation]!"

With a little *pop*, a coin-shaped seed appeared in my palm. On the outside was an image of a plate, bowl, and cup. I also made myself a Cutlery Seed, which had an image of a fork, knife, and spoon on it.

Standing up, I walked a little bit away from the feather bed and planted both seeds in the ground. They sprouted in an instant, growing fruit shaped like tableware and cutlery. I quickly harvested them, and then the leaves and stalks withered into fertilizer.

Now I've got tableware and cutlery, but nowhere to put it... For now, I put it on top of the bed before making another seed.

"I'll make a seed that grows into fruit shaped like a table and chair—[Seed Creation]!"

With another *pop*, a coin-shaped seed appeared in my hand once again. And of course, it had an image of a table and chair on it. Eager to try it out, I planted it a bit away from the feather bed. Since it was growing a table and chair, the plant ended up being taller than me. Though I had some trouble thanks to the size, I took the table and chair fruit and set them up near the bed. They looked pretty sturdy, so they probably wouldn't collapse if I tried sitting down there. I set the tableware and cutlery on top of the table before setting out to make Water Seeds.

"I'll make a Water Seed—[Seed Creation]!"

I planted this one close to the table. It sprouted immediately, growing into a stem before a flower bloomed. Tipping the flower, water dripped out, which I caught in my bowl. Once it was about halfway full, the flower withered.

I took a sip of the water to test, and it was cold and thirst-quenching. Knowing I'd need more later, I made a bunch of Water Seeds, and sent them to my storage room through my bracelet.

"Next, I'll need something to eat..."

The Communication Spirit glowed weakly at my words.

«Lady Chelsea, I must go...» it whispered apologetically. Being such a low-ranked Spirit, it couldn't stay in our world for very long.

"It's been that long already? Okay, then. Bye-bye," I said, giving it a little wave as it disappeared into my bracelet.

The cave dimmed without the Spirit's glow, now only lit by the luminescent moss. I thought of planting some Shining Grass, but I was worried that it would lead to the moss withering because of the grass's growth. *So what I need now is a seed that'll bloom into some sort of light.*

“I’ll make a seed that grows a lamp-like flower that brightens and dims at my command—[Seed Creation].”

A walnut-shaped seed appeared on my palm with a little *pop*. I set that on the table for now, then grabbed my cup, and filled it with the fertilizer that the table and chair’s plant had withered into. All I had to do now was put the lamp-like flower seed in the cup, and... The cup became a base for a lamp flower that I could carry around.

I set this newly potted lamp plant onto the table, and it brightly illuminated the cave in the Spirit’s absence. Back at the Sargent Margraviate’s manor, there was a flower-shaped lamp. It’s shape had heavily inspired what this lamp flower ended up looking like.

Though I was still inside a cave, I was a bit more relieved now that it was well lit. *It’s a bit lonely without the Communication Spirit though. I hope it can come back soon.*

Just as I thought that, my stomach rumbled. “Now I need to make something I can eat...”

Since I’m the only one here, it might be safe to make a plant that’s written about in the book that Lord Royz gave me.

“I’ll make a quick-growing chocolate-colored vine plant—[Seed Creation]!”

A number of little black seeds popped out, and I planted them on one side of the cave. Soon after, chocolate-vines grew from them. It bore a palm-sized fruit, which I took and cracked open. Inside, I found a white pulp filled with seeds.

Since it was the first time I’d ever seen this, I nervously took a scoop of it with my spoon and put it in my mouth. The texture was a bit sticky, but it had a light sweetness. *It’s not too sweet, so I can probably eat a lot of this.* Thinking that, I ate my fill of the fruit.

A while later, I heard the sound of something dropping near the cave’s entrance. Looking back, Simurgh had returned, dropping something from its beak that it’d been carrying.

“Welcome back,” I said.

Simurgh looked surprised, gesturing deeper inside the cave with its wing. It was probably asking where the lamp and table had come from.

“I made them with my Skill,” I said. *Or, more accurately, I grew them. But it doesn’t need to know that.*

Simurgh didn’t seem to understand, because it kept tilting its head. After a bit, it gave up and returned to the entrance to pick up the thing it’d dropped earlier. Bringing it to me, the object looked to be a branch with a bunch of red, fist-sized fruit attached. It was giving off a distinct sweet smell too. Simurgh used its claw and beak to grab a red fruit and eat it, repeating that a few times before holding the

fruit out to me.

“Um...thank you?” Since it had handed the fruit to me after showing they were edible, it was probably telling me to eat. But I was full from the chocolate-vine fruit...

Simurgh tilted its head, seemingly asking if I wasn't going to eat. I took one of the chocolate-vine fruit growing near the wall of the cave and handed it over to the bird.

“I ate these, so I'm full. I'll save the red fruit for later, okay?”

After I said that, Simurgh blinked a couple times before eating the chocolate-vine fruit, skin and all. The book had said the skin was edible regardless of how you prepared it, so that was probably fine.

I observed Simurgh carefully for a bit, but it didn't seem like it was getting sick or anything. In fact, it seemed happy.

“Chiiiiiiirp! Tweet, chirp?”

Does it want more? I thought, then said, “I grew lots, so eat as many as you want.”

Once I'd given my permission, the giant bird dropped the branch full of red fruit and stood in front of the chocolate-colored vines near the wall. It began happily pecking away at them.

That night, I rolled around in the bed made of Simurgh's soft blue feathers, unable to sleep.

Lord Glen was definitely going to save me. I knew that, but I was still worried. On nights like this, I could only sleep when I had the lavender potpourri that he'd given me nearby.

Taking the little bag back from my Spirit storage, I sniffed it. Smelling the refreshing sweetness helped calm me down, but made me lonely. Simurgh was close by, but since I couldn't understand what it said, I still had a hard time taking my mind off my current predicament.

If only the Communication Spirit was here... But no matter how much I wished, the little Spirit was only able to stay in our world for a short while. It was then that I remembered what Rene had told me back when we were shopping in the Radzuel Empire.

“When a Spirit is given a name by someone important to them, their rank rises dramatically. They become able to stay in this world longer, and are able to do more things. It means a lot for Spirits.”

That's right... All I need to do is name the Communication Spirit so that it can stay out longer! I'd need to give it a wish to grant too, but there was something I wanted now. *The next time it appears, I'll make my wish and give it a name...* I decided to myself, drifting off to sleep.

+ + +

The next morning, I woke up to the voice of the Communication

Spirit.

«Good morning, Lady Chelsea!»

«Good morning, Communication Spirit.»

After exchanging greetings, I had one of the Water Seeds from yesterday returned to me, and planted it in the ground. With the flower that sprouted, I used the dripping water from it to wash my face, then lightly brushed the dirt off of my clothes.

For breakfast, I ate one of the sweet-smelling red fruits Simurgh had brought, but it was incredibly sour. *But it smelled so good though!*

It seemed that Simurgh had gone off somewhere early in the morning, since it wasn't in the cave. The Communication Spirit, on the other hand, was having fun flying around the lamp and chocolate-vine plants that were planted while the Spirit was in the Spirit World. *Since it's here now, I should tell it what I thought up before it goes back to sleep.*

“I, um, have a request for you, Communication Spirit,” I said, feeling a bit nervous.

The little Spirit glittered brightly. «D’you mean I’m goin’ to have a name now?!»

I nodded, and it started flying circles around me in sheer joy.

«Ah! But I must grant your wish... So tell me that first!» it said, stopping on the back of my hand.

After taking a deep breath, I said my wish. “I’d like for you to chat with me while I’m here in this cave!”

«I-Is that it?» The Spirit dimmed, seemingly worried. I nodded back. «I can do that, but...I can still chat without being asked, you know?»

“Well, I’m asking you to be my conversation partner out of my own selfishness, so I thought it might be best to make it my wish...”

I’d been lonely since I’d been brought to Simurgh’s roost, and I couldn’t really chat with the giant bird. That was why I felt asking for this was selfish on my part.

The Communication Spirit’s glow dimmed again as it started worrying.

«I’m happy you wanna give me a name, but just askin’ me to chat... Hmmm... Hmmmmmm...» After thinking for a while, it started slowly blinking. «Um, Lady Chelsea. After I’m named, will you form a contract with me?»

“Giving you a name is different from making a contract?”

«Spirits get stronger when we’re named. It’s a good thing for us,» the Spirit explained. «When we make a contract, you’ll be able to use my powers. That’s a good thing for you.»

Spirits benefit from getting a name, while I’d benefit from contracting with it. But wouldn’t that mean I should only give it a name? I thought to myself, but the little Spirit got mad.

«But that's not a fair trade! Only takin' things will bring you ruin...»

“R-Really...?” I asked, not quite understanding. “Anyway, um...as long as you chat with me, I'll make a contract with you.”

The Spirit started shining brightly. «Yay! Okay, so now I gotta be formal. I'll chat with Lady Chelsea, so gimme a name!»

I told the Communication Spirit the name I'd thought up. “Your name shall be ‘Root.’”

«Root... My name is Root!” the Spirit shouted.

The newly named Spirit then began to shine so brightly that I couldn't keep my eyes open, so I shut them tight. Eventually the light dimmed, and I opened them again.

Root seemed to have transformed from a little speck of light to a form that resembled a little boy. He looked to be about ten years old, but the size of my thumb. He had big black eyes, and fluffy light-purple hair cut around his chin. He wore a loose hooded shirt with little pants that ended just under his knees. To top it all off, on his back was a pair of purple butterfly-like wings.

«Yay! Now I can stay in this world for longer!» He was speaking a lot more clearly now. He floated up lightly and kissed me on the nose. «I'll make the contract now. My name is Root, the Communication Spirit, and I'm contracting to Lady Chelsea!»

After saying this, my right index finger began to shine. Back when I'd contracted with Ele, it had been my thumb that glowed.

“Are we contracted now?”

«Yep! Now you can use telepathy!»

“Telepathy?” I repeated in confusion, unfamiliar with the word.

Root flapped his wings, then said, «Telepathy means you can transmit your thoughts to someone else. You can talk with someone with your mind by touching them.»

Wow! What an amazing power! I thought, my eyes wide from the sudden realization.

The Spirit smiled. «I've got a name now, but I'm still a low-ranked Spirit, so I can't stay in this world for an entire day... That's why I wanted to make a contract with you, so you could talk to Simurgh while I'm not here!»

It seemed that Root had contracted with me because he'd understood how lonely I felt. This fact made me so happy that I was near tears.

“Thank you...Root.”

«No, thank *you* for naming me, Lady Chelsea!»

As Root was teaching me how to use my telepathy, Simurgh returned. Today, it was carrying fruit that looked like yellow grapes.

“Welcome back,” I said, prompting the bird to walk over to me

happily. Then, I touched its neck and tried using telepathy. < Can you...hear me? >

< What in the world? Where am I hearing your voice from?! >
She sounded like an elderly woman, but her voice was really endearing.

< I can use telepathy now to talk to anyone I'm touching. >

My words made Simurgh drop the fruit she was holding to the ground, her beak flapping open and closed in shock.

Root giggled at her. «Lady Chelsea gave me a name, so I made a contract with her as thanks. This way she can use telepathy too!»

Apparently, he could hear our telepathic conversation.

< I thought you were a strange girlie for having a Spirit with you, but I'm still flabbergasted, > Simurgh said, sounding exhausted. She shook her head. < Now that we can talk like this, I've got a lot of questions for you. >

< I do too. >

After that, I let Simurgh go first, and she asked me about the table, chair, and lamp that had suddenly appeared in the cave.

< You said that you made them with your Skill, but I just don't understand how. >

I demonstrated the process for her by creating a coin-shaped seed, planting it, and showing her the cup and plate that bloomed from it.

Her jaw dropped. < My, now I *really* understand how amazing your Skill is... Okay, it's your turn to ask me something. >

< Why did you bring me here? >

< You didn't know who I was? Oh, I've done a terrible thing to you then, > Simurgh lamented.

Apparently, she was the sacred bird that the Chief Representative of the Martec Republic told me about. I remembered being told that the bird rescued good children who were attacked by monsters. I told Simurgh this, and she shook her head.

< I can see into the future, y'see, and it shows me when children who will do good for the country are attacked by monsters or anything else. I made a promise to a little kyewt child a long, long time ago that I'd do whatever I could to save them... > she said, recalling the past. < In other words, I know you're gonna do good for our country. >

The only thing I could do was use my [Seed Creation] Skill to make the seeds I wish for. I didn't know what exactly "good" entailed.

Seeing my visible confusion, Simurgh explained, < You know of the decreasing mana within the land the past few years, yes? >

I nodded, thinking back to the mana drought, and how the greenery had gradually declined as we headed to Martec's capital.

< In the future, I see you're gonna be solving that. So I knew I had

to save you no matter what. >

I still wasn't sure if I could solve the problem, but I understood why she'd saved me and brought me here.

< Ah, that's right, you said someone was coming for you? >

< Yes, > I replied with a nod.

Tilting her head, Simurgh asked, < Do you know where they are?

>

Given I was contracted with Ele, we always knew where the other was. But I doubted he'd be coming for me since he couldn't leave the Spirit Tree sapling alone. I couldn't immediately think of who else it could be.

I shook my head, unable to come up with an answer.

She heaved a sigh, and said, < I can't promise I'll find them, but I can go look. What do they look like? >

Thinking of my traveling companions, I described them to her. Lord Glen was human, with navy-blue hair and blue eyes, and wouldn't stand out thanks to the traveling clothes he was wearing. Miss Micah was a foxwoman with light-orange hair, big fox ears, and a fluffy tail. I also told her about what the guard knights wore.

< I'll go out looking then. You be a good girl and stay here, > Simurgh said, then left from the cave.

6. Reunion

A while after Simurgh had left to search for my rescue party...

I'd started reading through the book on plants that Lord Royz gave to me again...but honestly, I was bored of it already. Wanting to do something else, I called out to Root with an idea in mind.

"I'm thinking about making some new seeds. What do you think would be good?"

Root put his hand to his chin, thinking. Seeing a little being the size of your thumb lost in thought was honestly adorable. After thinking for a bit, he pointed to the chocolate-vine growing near the wall.

«I'd be happy with a chocolate-vine fruit with cookies inside!»

"That sounds fun!"

«I would also be happy with madeleines, biscotti, or pound cake!»

Talking about those sweets made me want to eat them. I took the wooden knife I'd grown the day before and started drawing in the dirt.

"If there were cookies inside...I'd need to make the fruit a little bit bigger. And in case it doesn't work, I'll have it only grow one fruit to make disposal easier. I'll also have it wither into fertilizer after being harvested like I usually do. It won't leave any seeds either..."

My drawings were crude, to say the least, but I drew out my plans. I looked at my finished drawings and nodded to myself. Root cheered in excitement.

"Okay, I'm gonna try! I'll make a seed for a fruit filled with cookies—[Seed Creation]!"

A seed shaped like a thinly baked cookie popped into existence on the palm of my hand. Then, I planted it in the corner of the cave. It sprouted immediately, just as I wished. But it grew to be shorter than a real chocolate-vine plant, being about as tall as I was instead. And finally, a big fruit grew at a height I could comfortably pick. It was light brown, just like a cookie would be. My heart began to pound as I harvested the fruit, and the vine and leaves instantly broke down into fertilizer.

"I'm gonna open it..."

I showed the melon-like fruit, so big it didn't fit in both of my hands together, to Root before splitting it like I had the chocolate-vine. Inside were ten freshly baked cookies.

"Wow, it really worked..."

«Oh my! Amazing!» Flying around in glee, he grabbed a cookie bigger than himself and took a bite. «They're so good!»

I followed his lead and tried one. Surprisingly, it tasted exactly like the cookies Miss Micah often baked for me. Everything Miss Micah made was delicious, whether it be a meal or sweets, so I must have subconsciously reproduced the same flavor.

Doesn't this mean I could make any food?!



After that, I made fruits filled with madeleines, biscotti, and pound cake—eating them all with Root. Everything was delicious, but I'd created more than we could eat alone. I used the Spirit Tree Bracelet on my left wrist and sent the leftovers for the Storage Spirits. I also asked Root to tell them to split it all up, and he disappeared with the treats into my bracelet.

Once I was full, Simurgh returned. But she was acting strange. I tilted my head questioningly again as I approached her, and she rested her beak on the top of my head. She probably wanted to say something, so I used my telepathy.

< It smells very sweet in here. What happened while I was away?

>

< I made seeds with baked treats and ate them, > I said simply, but it was apparently enough for her to understand.

< Your Skill really is odd... Ah, but forgetting all that, the people coming to get you are headed straight here. I gave them some clear directions to get to the cave, so they should be arriving shortly. >

< I'll see everyone again soon! > Just the thought was enough to make me jump with glee.

< You really seemed lonely here, > Simurgh said apologetically, nuzzling her beak against my cheek.

While the two of us were talking, I heard a voice from the entrance to the cave.

"Chelsea...?"

It was Lord Glen, his clothes and boots covered in mud.

"Lord Glen!"

I went to rush over to him, but Simurgh caught me by the arm and stopped me. Lord Glen stopped in his tracks, glaring at her.

< Wait. I must know something first. >

I tilted my head in confusion.

< This man won't make you unhappy if you go with him, will he?

>

< Lord Glen is the one that rescued me from a horrible place before. He's been making me happy ever since we met, so it should be fine, > I explained to her with a smile.

Using my free arm, I stroked her beak.

< He's also...my fiancé, > I admitted bashfully.

< You're...you're old enough to have a fiancé?! > It seemed that fact had shocked her more than anything else that had happened since she brought me here.

< I'm actually fourteen already. >

< A fiancé at age fourteen... You humans pick your mates so early, > she said, letting go of my arm. She then nudged me forward

with her beak. <It's okay now. You can go to him, child that will bring happiness to this country.>

Wait...I never introduced myself! I thought, shaking my head. "My name is Chelsea. Bye-bye, Simurgh."

I gave her a little wave, then ran to Lord Glen at the entrance to the cave. He hugged me, looking as if he'd burst into tears at any moment.

"I'm so glad you're safe!" he said hoarsely. Hearing him like this really tugged at my heartstrings.

"I'm sorry... I'm sorry for worrying you..."

The moment the words left my mouth, I felt something cold drip down my cheek. I'd acted like I was fine, making seeds and chatting with Root, but I was really incredibly lonely. I kept telling myself I shouldn't think it was bad, because unlike back at the Eucharis Barony, I had enough food and a soft place to sleep. In all honesty though, suddenly being carried away was scary.

All the feelings I'd been repressing came pouring out, and I began to sob. Lord Glen got a little bit teary too. He embraced me and began stroking my hair.

After having my head patted for a while, I eventually calmed down, and my tears stopped. *I'm happy we're together again... It's been so long since he's patted my head like this*, I thought.

The sound of rustling could be heard from outside the cave. I looked up and saw Miss Micah and the guard knights near the entrance.

"W-We've...finally caught up~" Miss Micah said wearily, collapsing to the ground.

They all looked exhausted. The knights' shoulders were heaving with every breath too. Some had their hands on their knees, trying not to flop down, while others were using their sheathed swords as walking sticks.

I looked up at Lord Glen, and he glanced towards Simurgh, then said, "I chased after the bird since it looked like it was trying to lead us somewhere, but it seems I got here before everyone else."

"His Highness can run faster than me, and I'm a beastwoman~! It's...scary~"

"Are your boots like that because you ran so fast, Lord Glen?" I asked.

Realizing I was still in his arms, he quickly moved away, a startled expression on his face.

"I didn't realize I was this dirty... Sorry, Chelsea."

He immediately used *Clean* to get all the dirt off of himself, then hugged me again. Hugs were nice, but it was a bit embarrassing when we were in front of everyone.

“I’m not letting you go again today...!” he whispered quietly so that only I could hear.

So it wasn’t just me who was lonely... Realizing this, I let him keep hugging me despite my embarrassment.

Afterwards, he picked me up, and we went back inside the cave.

“Even if we left right now, we wouldn’t be able to make it back to the closest town tonight. Would it be all right for us to stay here for the night?” Lord Glen asked Simurgh.

Apparently, Simurgh’s roost was on the side of a very steep mountain, and the only way down was by foot. Lord Glen and the others had left their horses back in the town at the base of it.

Since descending the mountain was probably better done in the daylight, I asked Simurgh if we could stay the night. She quickly nodded her approval and led everyone deeper inside.

Once we were there, Lord Glen blinked in surprise. “Why is there a table, chair, and lamp inside the cave?”

“I made them with my Skill,” I answered. He lowered me down into the nearby chair.

“What do you mean?”

To show him, I made another of every seed I’d created since being brought here, and lined them all up on the table.

“This is a Tableware Seed that grows a plate, bowl, and cup. This is one of the Cutlery Seeds you gave to Tris before, that grows a fork, knife, and spoon. And this here is...I see. It’s a Dining Set Seed that makes a table and chair,” Lord Glen said, looking at the illustrations on the seeds as he appraised them all.

It was a big help that he was telling me all this, because now I could just say the seeds’ names to make them.

“A Water Seed that drips water from its flower, a Flower Lamp Seed, and a Chocolate-Vine Seed... The chocolate-vine one is essentially an akebia, just made to grow fast, huh?”

I nodded.

“They’re all amazing. Tris’ll be thrilled.”

Right after he said that, Root came flying out of my Spirit Tree Bracelet. Lord Glen cocked his head in confusion when he saw the thumb-sized little Spirit with butterfly wings.

«Lady Chelsea... Oh, everyone is here!» the little Spirit said, settling down on the top of my head.

Lord Glen gazed at Root.

“You named the Communication Spirit,” he said, seeming to have appraised him. Lord Glen’s expression morphed into one of surprise.

«I’m the Communication Spirit Root. I’m contracted to Lady Chelsea!»

“So you contracted with her too?”

«Yep!» Root responded eagerly. It seemed he was really happy that I'd made a contract with him. «Ah! Everyone from your storage room wanted me to tell you that the treats were delicious, and to thank you!»

"I can create those baked treats whenever, so I'll give them some again sometime," I replied.

Lord Glen froze. "Did you just say... 'create'?"

"Yes. I created seeds that grow into cookies and pound cake."

His jaw dropped, and I made another set of all of the seeds for him to appraise.

"Cookie Seed, Madeleine Seed, Biscotti Seed, Pound Cake Seed... That's really amazing."

He planted a Madeleine Seed near the wall as a test, and it immediately sprouted. The stalk grew and flowered, before growing a single chocolate-vine-like fruit. When he plucked it from the vine, the stem and leaves quickly turned into fertilizer. After seeing this, he split one of the large melon-like yellow fruits in half, releasing a sweet smell into the cave. Inside were a few freshly baked madeleines.

Miss Micah approached, lured by the smell.

"Fresh-baked madeleines~?" she cried in surprise as she looked at the innards of the fruit.

"I've appraised them, and they really are madeleines. Can I eat one?"

I nodded.

"Micah's gonna eat one too~!"

Each of them grabbed a madeleine and ate it in sync.

"It's good..."

"It tastes just like the madeleines I make~!"

"It seems they copied the taste because I like your cooking and baking so much," I said, making Miss Micah's eyes go wide. Then, since the guard knights were looking on in interest, I passed out the rest of the madeleines to them.

"Chelsea, you're amazing~!"

Having finished her madeleine, she launched herself at me.

"You could make any food you've ever tried~! You're... You're gonna make your chef cry~!" she yelped, grabbing my shoulders and shaking me.

If I could make myself food with my Skill, I wouldn't need a chef anymore. That'd mean that Miss Micah would lose her position as my personal chef.

"I want to eat your cooking, Miss Micah, so, um...I'll only make food when I'm in trouble," I said, trying to calm her down.

"Then you'll have to try even harder than before to keep yourself out of trouble~! I'm really so glad you're safe, Chelsea~" the

foxwoman said, pulling me in for a hug.

That night, Miss Micah took a portable kitchen out of her Item Box and made us lots of different food. I made more Dining Set Seeds to have enough seats for all of the guard knights to sit on, and we all ate together for the first time in a while.

Food really tastes better when you eat it with other people. Simurgh carrying me away made me all the more thankful for everyone's presence.

+ + +

The next morning, we readied ourselves to say goodbye to Simurgh. We were going to head back to the town at the base of the mountain where our horses were waiting. But the giant bird rested her beak on the top of my head.

<What's wrong?> I asked telepathically.

<Chelsea... You'll never reach town today on those legs of yours,> she answered. <I'll take you down, so you should tell the others to leave first.>

It was true that I wouldn't be able to descend down the mountain as fast as trained knights or a beastwoman like Miss Micah.

<Thank you. I'll let them know,> I replied before approaching Lord Glen as he prepared to leave. "Um...Simurgh offered to fly me down to the town..."

Tilting his head, he said, "Hm? That'd be great... But, you mean you can hear the sacred bird's voice?"

"No, I used telepathy to speak with her inside my head."

I told him how I gained the ability to use telepathy after contracting to Root, along with a basic explanation for how to use it, and he grabbed my hand.

"So you can speak with anyone you touch in your mind... Can you do it with me too?"

<Can you hear me?> I asked him.

Lord Glen's eyes sparkled. <I can. This will come in handy,> he said, before putting his hand on his chin to think. <There's something I'd like to try... Can I?>

I nodded, and he continued.

<I'm wondering if I'll be able to speak with the sacred bird through you by having you touch both of us at once.>

It seemed like it would be fun, so I agreed to try it out.

Hand in hand, the two of us walked back over to Simurgh. When I reached towards her beak, she snuggled up to my hand.

<I'm using telepathy on both of you, but can you still hear me?> I asked, my heart beginning to pound.

They both answered me.

<I can hear you,> Lord Glen replied.

<You're amazing me again! I can hear you,> Simurgh cried in my mind, shocked. She looked at Lord Glen, and said, <If we can speak like this, then I can talk to you too...>

<Ah, I haven't introduced myself. My name is Glen.>

<I'm Simurgh.>

Both Lord Glen and Simurgh exchanged greetings in my mind. It felt silly for some reason, and I couldn't help but giggle. And my giggling was contagious, because the two of them soon burst out laughing.

After we all got it out of our systems, Simurgh raised a wing.

<Oh, why don't you ride on my back too, Glen? We'll reach town quickly, after all. You can stay with Chelsea until the others arrive.>

<That sounds perfect. Please do.>

And so, it was decided that Lord Glen and I would ride down the mountain on Simurgh's back.

After seeing Miss Micah and the guard knights off from the cave entrance, Lord Glen and I hopped on Simurgh's back.

"You sit in front, and I can sit behind you. I'll cast some magic to make sure we don't fall," Lord Glen said, using magic to keep us attached to Simurgh.

Thanks to that, there was no way we could fall off. Plus, with Lord Glen seated behind me, I wouldn't get knocked back either.

<I thought Chelsea was somethin', but you've got some good stuff up your sleeves too, Glen,> Simurgh murmured after seeing his magic.

Her praise for him made me happy, as if she was praising me instead.

<Let's go.> With that, she took to the air.

Out of fear, I hadn't looked around when she'd brought me to the cave. But this time, I was on her back and had Lord Glen behind me, so I could look as much as I wanted.

<Since we'd get to the town at the base of the mountain in no time... Why don't I take this chance to show you around?>

Simurgh could fly faster than Lord Royz. Before I knew it, we'd already passed the town.

<You're so fast...!> I said to her telepathically.

<Oh, so you've flown through the sky before, Chelsea?> she asked.

<Yes. Um, the Emperor of Radzuel has flown us before,> I answered, and the sacred bird gave me a chuckle.

<Ah, that dragonman. Bit of a strange one. I saw that kid fly a few hundred years ago, and he was pretty fast himself.>

<How old is Simurgh, if she can call Lord Royz a kid...?>

It seemed that the thought I had went through my telepathy instead. Simurgh answered me in a lower voice than usual, <Haven't you been taught not to ask a lady her age?>

I panicked, having asked something I shouldn't have.

Simurgh chuckled again, and said, <You're a real weird one yourself.>

While we'd been talking, we'd already passed the capital with its tower-like castle. As we went further north, the amount of greenery increased.

<So even to the north, the plant life disappears the closer it gets to Martec's capital...> I murmured.

Both Lord Glen and Simurgh agreed with my statement.

<It's even easier to see from the sky.>

<The greenery has been disappearing more and more these past few years.>

We approached what were known as "the great northern mountains," and decided to turn around. Flying southwest, we headed back towards the capital. From our vantage point, we could see that the greenery was disappearing from a spot a bit to the northwest of the capital.

Having the opportunity to see the state of everything around the capital like this made me feel a myriad of emotions. And while I was trying to take it all in, Simurgh landed to drop us off in the town near the base of the mountain.

We hopped off her back a short distance from the entrance. Lord Glen and I stood in front of her to say our thanks and parting words, but before I could speak up, the giant bird used her beak to pull a single blue feather from her back, and pressed it into my hands. It was just about big enough to fit in my palm, and had a sparkle to it—unlike the feathers that'd been used for the bed back at her roost.

Where in the world did she pull this little feather out of when she's so big? I thought.

"It's called 'Simurgh's Blue Feather,' and it can be burned to summon her, but it won't burn you..." said Lord Glen, reading off the item's appraisal results. Simurgh gave a small chirp in response, as if to say she agreed with his assessment.

I reached my hand out and touched her beak. Using telepathy, I said to her, <I'll treasure it.>

She just sighed. <If you need my help, you *must* call for me, okay? Store it somewhere on yourself, so it's easily accessible for when you need me. Ah, and absolutely *do not* just use it to decorate your room!>

She's probably trying to hide her embarrassment, I thought to myself,

a smile coming to my face.

I wasn't sure where to put the feather, so for the time being, I pinned it to my chest. Simurgh gave me a nod. Once she'd confirmed it was somewhere on me, she backed away, spread her wings, and with a *caw*, she flew into the sky. I followed her with my gaze until she instantly disappeared from view.

"Huh?!"

"Simurgh can hide herself to keep others from tracking her. She did the same thing when she took you away."

When she'd carried me away, I'd had my eyes closed tight in terror, so I hadn't understood what was happening. While I was shocked by Lord Glen's words, I waved to Simurgh, who was still probably there in the sky.

"Bye-bye!"

+ + +

Since we'd arrived before noon, Lord Glen and I decided to explore the town together. It was a lot bigger than I expected.

"The reason there are so many people here in this town is because of the dungeon close by."

"Dungeon...?" I repeated. This was the first time I'd heard of such a thing.

Lord Glen then gave me an explanation. Dungeons were cave-like places filled with things called dungeon monsters, and strong people called adventurers defeated those dungeon monsters every day...

"Beating normal monsters gets you raw materials and meat, but *dungeon* monsters disappear into a burst of smoke when you beat them, and drop magic stones. If you're lucky, they even drop special tools."

"So the magic stones used in magic tools are found in dungeons?" I asked, getting a nod back.

Magic tools were used everywhere. They were lanterns, stoves—even the ring on my finger was a magic tool...

"It's thanks to those adventurers that we can live so easily, huh!"

As we were talking, Lord Glen paused in front of a shop selling magic stones.

"Can we pop in here?" he asked.

"Of course."

"I'm just going to talk to the owner for a bit."

I nodded at him before turning my gaze to the stones. There was a red one the size of a sunflower seed, a flat blue one the size of my palm, a long and thin yellow one, and a colorless one that was round like a piece of candy. *These magic stones have all kinds of different shapes and colors.*

Once I was through looking at all the stones in the showcase, I saw an explanatory note pinned to the wall. It read: “*You’ll only ever see a magic stone once! You never know what kind of stone a dungeon monster will drop!*”

Oh, so that’s why they’re all different... I thought to myself.

Suddenly, I felt a tapping on my shoulder.

“Sorry to keep you waiting.”

Turning around, I saw it was Lord Glen, smiling as he held a little box.

“You bought a stone?”

“Yep... There’s something I want to make with it.”

“What kind of magic tool are you making?” I asked, curious.

Lord Glen chuckled. “It’s a secret for now. I’ll give it to you as a present once it’s done.”

“I’ll look forward to it then.” I had no idea what it could be, but I’d be happy getting anything from Lord Glen.

With my eagerness for the future set, Lord Glen and I then walked out of the shop. As we walked towards the inn, an old dwarf manning a meat-skewer stand called out to me.

“Missy, take one of my skewers with ya!”

“Huh?!”

The dwarf smirked at my shock. “They say givin’ food to a kid with a blue feather on ’em is good luck, so take it!” he said, forcing a paper bag full of meat skewers on me.

“It’s not fair for you to be the only one giving her things!” an elf at the stand next to the dwarf’s shouted, and she then gave me a hot sandwich.

Before I knew it, my arms were full of food, so much that Lord Glen had to help carry it.

“What should I do with all of this...”

“First off, you should probably put that feather away,” Lord Glen said with an awkward smile.

I tried to send it to my storage room in the Spirit World, but nothing happened.

“Wha?” I murmured.

Out of the Spirit Tree Bracelet on my left wrist popped Root, the thumb-sized Communication Spirit.

«I’m sorry, Lady Chelsea. That feather can’t go to the Spirit World...»

There are things I can’t store there?! I was taken aback by this revelation.

Lord Glen looked at the feather intently, and said, “Hmm... It doesn’t say anything like that in the description... Maybe Simurgh is bound under some ancient agreement akin to the Spirits’, since she’s

something like them.”

That sounded plausible. She’d been able to talk with Root even before I named him.

Lord Glen and I talked more about this as we walked, and eventually we ended up in a square on the edge of town. We decided to sit down there and eat the food I’d been given.

“We can’t finish all of this, so you can eat some too, Root.”

«No problem! If there’s too much, can we split it with the Storage Spirits too?»

I gave him a nod back, knowing we’d still have a lot leftover.

Once the three of us had our fill, Root then took the leftovers with him to the Spirit World for the other Spirits. In the meantime, I hid the blue feather under my top, and headed towards the inn where our horses were waiting. We stopped by the stable first, and I was relieved to see the same horses we’d brought from Chronowize.

Afterwards, we moved to our rooms, and both Lord Glen and I sat down on the sofa. We both sat in silence for a bit, when suddenly Lord Glen lifted a lock of my hair to his lips. Then he hugged me. I stayed silent, since it seemed like he was making sure I was still with him.

“Chelsea, I’m so glad you’re safe...”

“I’m sorry for worrying you,” I answered.

Lord Glen pulled out of the hug, holding my hand instead as he spoke. “Since it was the Martec Republic’s sacred bird that took you away, I knew you wouldn’t be hurt. But I was worried about what you’d eat and where you’d sleep,” he admitted, frowning.

“My training to become a proper lady hadn’t taught me about what to do in that situation, but...I had experience from living back in the barony...”

When I said that, a look of surprise came over Lord Glen’s face “Ah, that’s true... You’re such a perfect lady now that I’d forgotten that even happened.”

“I never thought my experiences back then would come in handy. Anything can be a help, huh?” A smile rose to my lips when I realized how positive I’d become.

“You’ve grown a lot in the two days you were gone.”

I nodded in response.

That evening, Miss Micah and the guard knights arrived at the inn.

“We’ll be leaving at sunrise tomorrow, so sleep early,” Lord Glen warned. I agreed, and retired to bed soon after.

As the sun rose the next morning, we left the town at the base of the mountain.

7. Soil Improvement Seeds

Around sundown, we finally arrived back at the Spirit Tree sapling to the south of the capital. We got out of the carriage and headed from the road towards Ele in his Spirit form, who was sitting near the tree.

“We’re back, Ele.”

The Spirit answered me with a heavy sigh. “I’d heard from Root that you were safe, but was nonetheless still concerned.”

“I’m sorry for worrying you,” I immediately apologized.

Bringing his hand to his chin, Ele then said, “It’s no fault of yours, Lady Chelsea, but you won’t accept that answer, will you? I shall forgive you if you tell me later about everything that happened in the cave.”

It seemed he was taking my feelings into consideration, so I gave him a happy smile back.

“Okay. I’ll tell you all about it on the carriage ride back.”

He nodded. “Now that I have something to look forward to on our return trip, we must grow this Spirit Tree here,” he said, looking serious as his gaze fell on the sapling. “Three days have passed since you planted the cutting, but it hasn’t grown at all.”

The Spirit Tree sapling was only up to my waist, just as it had been right after I planted it. *Normally, it should have instantly grown to about the same height as the second floor of the Royal Research Institute.*

As I thought that to myself, Lord Glen spoke, smiling wryly. “I appraised the sapling, and its description reads: ‘There are too many things wrong with the soil. Improve it immediately.’”

“Pretty good instructions for a plant~” chimed Miss Micah from her spot beside me.

“Back when I appraised the Origin Spirit Tree’s seed, its description had the very specific instructions of ‘Only Chelsea should touch it. Quickly dig a hole in a large, sunny space near Chelsea and bury it.’”

Oh, that’s right! I nodded. “It’s almost as if the Spirit Trees have wills of their own.”

Spirit Ele gave me a blank look when I said that. “Of course they do.”

“What?!” Lord Glen, Miss Micah, and I all exclaimed at once.

“Without a will of its own, how would it be able to tell me when it

could prepare a cutting?"

"That's true..." I nodded along.

While all of us were chatting, I heard the sound of a carriage coming to a stop. It was the Martec Republic's chief representative, Lilibreina the kyewt. It seemed that one of the soldiers guarding the Spirit Tree sapling had sent word that we'd returned. The woman ran at me so quickly that I was worried she'd fall. She came to a stop right in front of me, and dropped to her knees apologetically.

"Lady Chelsea, I am so terribly sorry for what our country has done to you!"

"No, um... Please, stand. You're going to get your boots dirty..." I said, shocked by her actions. But the kyewt woman wouldn't stand up.

"Oh yeah, I hadn't told Chelsea yet," commented Lord Glen, before explaining how it had been one of the country's representatives that had brought the black-clothed men along.

"I have heard that you can return our blasted lands to what they were once before," Lady Lilibreina told me, still kneeling in apology.

Land that had lost its nutrients through overuse could gradually be restored to its former state using fertilizer to replenish the lost nutrients. In the same way, land suffering from a lack of mana or a mana drought should go back to normal if its mana is restored.

So she's asking me to make seeds to return mana to the land?

As I thought how to respond, Lord Glen tilted his head, asking, "Do you know what caused the land to dry out?"

"While we understand that the land became this way due to a mana drought...we still have no answer as to what caused the drought," Lady Lilibreina answered, lifting her face and looking frustrated. "But even though we don't know the cause, we still can't just sit and watch the land die! Lady Chelsea, please! Return the land to normal, even if only temporarily!" she begged, looking as if she was on the verge of tears.

"A timely request. The Spirit Tree cannot grow without mana. You should agree and bring mana back to the land."

"If the people of the Martec Republic are saying it's okay to do, then you should."

"It's your time to shine, Chelsea~!"

I nodded in agreement to Ele, Lord Glen, and Miss Micah's words. "All right."

When I said that, Lady Lilibreina's head shot up once again. "Thank you so much, Lady Chelsea!"

But just as we were about to brainstorm a blueprint for the seed...the kyewt woman looked confused.

"How will you be bringing the land back to life, Lady Chelsea?" she asked.

Ah, we haven't told her about my Skill yet, I thought, then said, "My Skill [Seed Creation] lets me create any seed I wish for."

"Any...that you wish for?!"

"Yes. That is how I can make seeds like this one, which grows fruit in the shape of tableware," I explained, making a Tableware Seed and planting it in the ground. It immediately sprouted, growing a cup, plate, and bowl. As soon as I harvested them, the stalk and leaves withered into smooth fertilizer.

"A-Amazing!" cried Lady Lilitreina in shock, looking over the cup fruit in her hands.

"I can make seeds that already exist or are easy to imagine immediately. But for others, I need to make up a proper blueprint, or I'll end up making something strange..."

"So that's why we need to think up a plan... I see," said Lady Lilitreina, nodding in understanding.

With that now established, I took my plant book out of my Spirit storage.

"There is a plant that can take nutrients from the air and store them in its roots, and when it wilts, those nutrients dissipate into the ground," I explained, opening my book to a certain plant.

"And you want to use that plant as a base to make a plant that stores the air's mana in its roots... Great idea." Lord Glen nodded along, impressed.

"Be sure not to make it take in too much mana and end up with a surplus," Ele warned, crossing his arms in front of his chest.

"What happens when there's a surplus of mana in the ground~?" Miss Micah asked.

Ele scowled. "To put it simply...it rots."

"Rots?!" Miss Micah, Lady Lilitreina, and I all cried out in unison. Lord Glen stayed silent, with a strange expression on his face.

"Lowering the concentration of mana in the air will also make humans sick."

"That's bad~!"

"That defeats the purpose!"

I nodded at Miss Micah and Lady Lilitreina's words. "Then I could make it so it only stores as much mana as would fit in its roots, and we could fine-tune the amount of mana by how many seeds we plant."

When I said that, both of them seemed relieved.

"If we're fine-tuning things based on how many seeds we plant, you should have the seed not multiply. It should grow for a single generation, and you could just make exactly as many seeds as we need," Lord Glen suggested, and I agreed.

Taking everyone's suggestions into account, we had Miss Micah draw up the plans.

“I’ve drawn it~!”

We based the appearance on the clovers described in my book. Looking over the blueprint, I nodded.

“I’ll make the seed then.” Taking a deep breath, I cast, “I’ll make a seed exactly as these blueprints say—[Seed Creation]!”

With a *pop*, a tiny seed appeared in my palm. I immediately had Lord Glen appraise it.

“It’s called a Soil Improvement Seed, and when planted, it grows into a plant that takes mana from the air and stores it in its roots. It withers once it absorbs a set amount into its roots, and after it becomes fertilizer, the mana is released into the soil. It lasts for one generation, and doesn’t flower or grow fruit.”

I was relieved that it came out exactly as the blueprint said.

“I’ll try planting it then,” I said, dropping the seed at my feet.

The seed immediately sprouted, its stems and leaves sprawling out across the ground. It only came up to my ankles, but the length and width of the patch grew to around my height, making something like a green carpet... Its leaves stopped spreading once it had stored the mana in its roots, and it instantly wilted.

Lord Glen stared at the ground where the Soil Improvement Seed had withered for a moment before groaning. “Well... After it withered, the mana level in the soil recovered to just deficient, but then it went straight back to drought status.”

“Then we’ll just have to plant a lot more seeds,” I murmured, getting nods back from everyone. “I’ll try planting more...”

Lord Glen wasn’t entirely in agreement, but for now, I’d just need to make a lot of Soil Improvement Seeds. I made them one by one.

“I’m making a Soil Improvement Seed—[Seed Creation]...”

After I’d used my Skill ten times, I sighed. Since I could only make a single seed for each cast, I would have to use my Skill a whole lot to make as many seeds as we needed. That would take way too long.

If only I could make ten seeds a cast...! I grumbled to myself before casting again. “Making another Soil Improvement Seed—[Seed Creation].”

But then, ten Soil Improvement Seeds dropped into my palm.

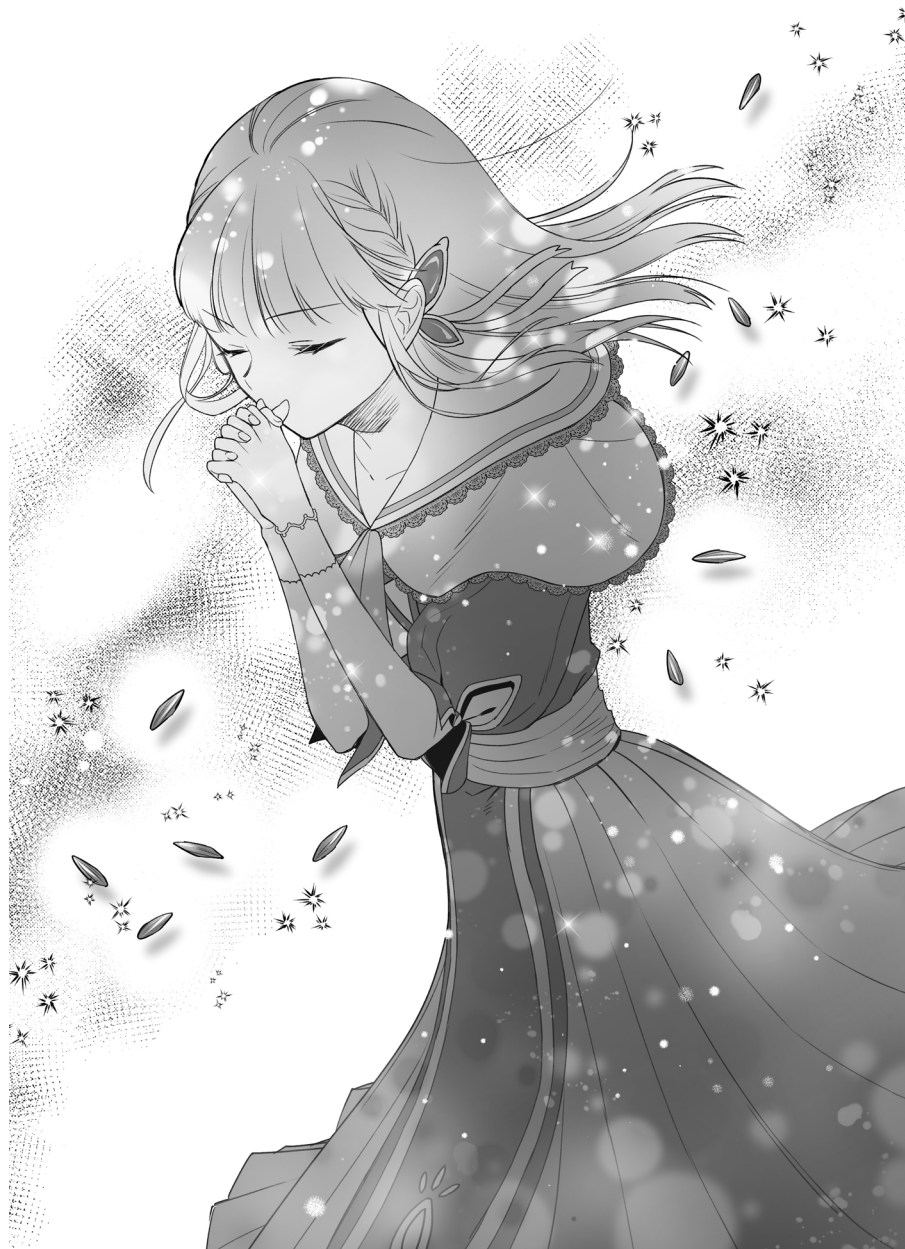
“Huh?” I gasped.

Lord Glen looked at my hand when I cried out in surprise. “Hm? You can make more than one seed a cast?”

“I was just wishing I could make ten seeds per cast while I used my Skill, and it actually worked,” I told him.

He looked at me carefully. “I wanna check your mana levels. Can you try making ten seeds at once again?”

Nodding, I cast my Skill again and made ten seeds.



“It takes up just as much mana as if you’d used your Skill ten times.”

Back at the Royal Research Institute, when I’d first tested how many seeds I could make, I had such a low mana capacity that ten seeds would deplete it all and cause me to faint. I’d been eating yummy food and sweets every day for over two years now though, so my mana pool had become much bigger. In fact, it wasn’t just as big as the average person’s, but was so large that it wouldn’t be odd for me to be in the Mage Order.

“I see. Your mana pool had been so small when we tested it at first that we just took you not making many at once as the standard. But in reality, you can make as many seeds as you want, provided you have the mana for it!” Lord Glen concluded, eyes sparkling.

After that, I had him watching my mana levels as I made as many seeds as would fit in a pile on my palm.

“Let’s try planting this many for now,” I said, checking with everyone before lightly throwing the Soil Improvement Seeds in a spreading movement from left to right. The seeds sprouted as soon as they hit the ground, leaves slowly spreading across. After the entire area became a carpet of greenery, they all withered at once.

Lord Glen looked intently at the ground. “That restored a lot of mana at once, but then the levels shot right back to drought status in an instant.”

“I saw a great mass of mana flow northwest,” Ele commented, looking that way. Up until now, he hadn’t joined in the conversation much at all.

“Flow? But according to literature, mana should *spread* through the air and earth,” Lord Glen said.

Ele nodded. “You are correct. Mana always spreads itself around uniformly.”

“So you mean that it’s strange for it to flow somewhere?” I asked, getting another nod from the Spirit.

“It would not flow anywhere unless it was intentionally being collected,” he murmured.

Lady Lillireina jumped with a start.

“Could that mean that there’s some kind of monster to the northwest collecting the mana?! We must follow the trail and defeat the monster immediately!” she cried, looking towards Ele in his Spirit form. “As a Spirit, can you not follow the trail of the mana?”

“You mean to have me join you on your mission of subjugation?” Ele asked back.

“Yes, absolutely!”

“I must protect the Spirit Tree sapling. Thus, I cannot leave this

place,” he answered, shaking his head.

“If it needs protecting, our soldiers can...” Lady Lillireina began arguing.

“I am not only protecting it from attacks. I am constantly casting magic to keep it from drying out or being damaged. As I am the only one who can do that, I cannot leave.”

Though I’d guessed that Ele wouldn’t be able to leave the sapling, I hadn’t realized he was still casting his magic on it. I finally understood why Ele had been waiting here.

“Then...we’ll have to think of another way,” muttered Lady Lillireina, shoulders dropping in disappointment.

Another way... I thought, before remembering Root, who could travel with me. And so I asked Ele, “Can other Spirits see mana?”

Ele shook his head. “No other Spirit can see it as well as I, and the only reason I saw it was due to its sheer size.”

“So even you can’t see it unless it’s a lot of mana, huh...” I murmured as silence fell over the group.

While we all were contemplating, the Spirit King sighed. Looking at me, he said, “You just need to make it so that someone other than me can see it.”

My Skill would make whatever seed I wished for. I could make *anything* I wished for.

“So...I just have to make a seed that lets everyone else see mana!”

Ele smirked. It seemed that was the right answer.

I immediately used my Skill to make what I’d thought up.

“I’ll make a Soil Improvement Seed that makes mana visibly light up—[Seed Creation]!” A tiny seed appeared in my hand with a *pop*. As everyone looked on, I held the seed out, and asked, “Lord Glen, can you appraise it, please?”

Lord Glen smiled and used his [Appraisal] Skill.

“It’s called a Glowing Soil Improvement Seed, and it’s exactly the same as a normal Soil Improvement Seed, aside from having the mana its roots release glow for a set amount of time.”

With Lord Glen’s appraisal, this meant it should be fine to plant. After coming to this conclusion, I dropped the seed at my feet. It immediately sprouted into a spreading green carpet. As it did, the ground started glowing slightly.

“That must be the roots glowing~!”

It seemed that the mana began glowing as soon as it was collected in the roots. Then, the plant quickly withered and became fertilizer.

“The ground recovered a tiny bit, just like last time,” Lord Glen said, just as the faint glow rushed to the northwest, before disappearing a fair distance away.

“A-Amazing! With this, we’ll be able to follow the flow of mana to

the monster that's collecting it!" Lady Lillireina cried, eyes flaring. "Lady Chelsea, please, give us the Glowing Soil Improvement Seeds!" She'd requested it with such vigor that I nodded without thinking. "How many seeds do you need?" I asked, and the kyewt woman fell deep into thought.

Miss Micah spoke up from next to her. "If it only glows for a certain length of time, you'll need a lot~ And if the monster is somewhere really far away, you'll need even more~"

Ele added to her thought. "Humans would not be able to follow something that dim during the day. Take into account planting many at once."

Hearing Miss Micah and Ele's words, Lady Lillireina fell even deeper into contemplation.

"Um...would it be possible for Lady Chelsea to accompany us, making more seeds as needed?" she finally squeezed her thoughts out.

If I go along, they'll never run out of seeds. Just as I was about to agree, Lord Glen stopped me.

"I won't allow you to take Chelsea anywhere with monsters," he declared, surrounding me in a hug, as if to hide me. Miss Micah fluffed her tail out too, looking menacing.

"I would only be accompanying you, not taking part in the fighting, right?" I asked from Lord Glen's arms.

I heard Lady Lillireina respond positively. "Yes, we would only need for you to create the seeds."

But even then, Lord Glen didn't show any signs of backing down.

"Lord Glen... If the worst-case scenario occurred and I was attacked by the monster, I wouldn't be hurt thanks to my ring," I said as I wiggled myself to lift my right hand beside my face.

The ring on my ring finger glittered in the light. It was my engagement ring, but also doubled as a magical tool that would automatically cast defensive magic if I was in danger. With it, I would never come to any harm.

"Would you please allow me to accompany them?"

Lord Glen let out a small sigh, then loosened his arms from around me.

"If I can go along with her too... I really don't want to say yes, but I'll allow it," he muttered, looking as if he had no choice.

"Micah's coming too~!"

All of the guard knights behind us nodded as well. It was reassuring to know they'd all be with me.

"If all I need to do is make the seeds, I'll accompany you," I said finally.

"Thank you so very much!" With a look of relief, she thanked me and turned to give her male elven aide orders to assemble a

subjugation party.

“The sun has already set, so could we leave tomorrow instead?” Lord Glen asked her.

“Of course! If we’re up against a monster, we’ll need to make preparations before embarking. You all have only just returned too, so please, rest first.”

And so, we headed back to the Martec Republic’s capital to rest in the castle’s guest rooms.

8. Following the Glowing Mana

Three days later, and with a monster-fighting force of nearly one hundred people, we left the capital through its south gate and gathered near the Spirit Tree sapling. The subjugation party was apparently made of Martec soldiers, based around those with Martial Arts, Magic, and Healing Skills. Lady Lillireina also said that they prioritized people who had experience fighting monsters.

Lady Lillireina stood a short distance away from the sapling, surrounded by the subjugation party. It seemed that she would be leading the charge this time.

“Lady Chelsea, may I ask you to plant the seeds around here?”

I nodded, taking a bowl of Glowing Soil Improvement Seeds from my Spirit storage. I’d been creating them little by little since the day after it was decided I’d go along, and I’d collected enough to fill the bowl.

“I’ll spread them now.”

I put my right hand in the bowl and grabbed as many seeds as would fit in my hand before tossing them in a sweeping motion. As soon as the seeds hit the ground, they sprouted and began growing. Seeing the carpet of greenery caused a stir in the subjugation party.

“How is it growing so fast?!”

“You can grow plants in these wastelands?”

“Been a while since I last saw a plant!”

Since I’d gotten used to my seeds growing at this speed, no matter where they were planted, I hadn’t expected it to cause as much of a commotion as it did. As I worried over how to respond, the plants withered, and the light that had been hidden under their leaves flowed towards the northwest.

I’m glad we could see it so clearly, since I used up so many seeds!

After traveling a distance, the light faded.

“Now, as I’ve explained previously, I’d like for you all to chase that light. There’s a chance that a monster is gathering mana at the end of the trail, so be careful,” Lady Lillireina explained to the party, getting nods back from all of them.

And so, we moved to the spot where the light had faded, then planted more seeds. We did this repeatedly, going further and further northwest. The full bowl of Glowing Soil Improvement Seeds was emptying quickly. Since I figured it would be a good idea to make

some more, I'd been making them as we moved. Lord Glen was watching my mana level as I did, so there was no chance I'd end up fainting.

Eventually, we arrived about halfway between the capital and the northwestern mountain, on a completely barren hill. We were quite far from any man-made roads, and there were no signs of any people nearby. The top of the hill was the highest point in the area, giving us a good vantage point.

"We have a good view here."

"I see no monsters either, so it'd probably be a wonderful sight if not for the mana drought."

While Lord Glen and I chatted, Miss Micah pointed towards a slightly dented spot farther down the northwest side of the hill.

"There's a building over there~!" she shouted.

Looking closer, inside the dented area was a little mountain-shaped building with mud walls the same color as the surrounding ground hidden there.

"I didn't notice until you pointed it out..." I murmured, and Lord Glen nodded.

"It looks like they didn't want anyone noticing," he said, staring at the building.

He must have been using his [Appraisal] Skill. I watched him as he did, and eventually his expression changed to one indescribable.

"It's a 'Mana Research Facility' that studies infusing water with mana. It also has perception-blocking magic. It's amazing you saw it," he complimented Miss Micah after rattling off the appraisal results. She looked proud, her tail standing up straight. "Beastmen have good vision and smell, so they're great against concealment magic, huh?"

"Yep~! I couldn't see through magic as strong as yours or Lord Royz's, but that level's easy~!"

As we spoke, Lady Lillireina glared at the building. "Infusing water with mana... Where are they getting the mana for that?"

I realized as soon as she said it. I asked, "Could that building be...what's collecting the mana from the earth?"

Lady Lillireina clenched her fists. "You may be right. That never crossed my mind, since I'd thought it was a monster. But it very well *could* be what you say."

"If the building is where the mana's being collected, it'd likely be apparent after planting the seeds. The light'll just pass by if they're innocent, but it would disappear into the building if it had anything to do with the drought, right?" Lord Glen suggested, pointing towards it.

"We can plant lots of seeds and get to the bottom of it~!" Miss Micah exclaimed, making seed-sowing motions with her arms.

Seeing this, Lady Lillireina tapped her fist on her palm. "If we

planted enough, and the building is where the mana is going, it might light up completely.”

“That would be interesting...” I said, giggling.

And so, I decided to plant all of the seeds left in the bowl. It was less than half of the bowl, but enough to fit in both of my hands. I scattered them in front of me as if I were splashing water, and they sprouted and spread their leaves just as usual. The barren hill was suddenly covered in green.

“I’m amazed every time I see it~” Miss Micah said, getting nods of agreement from the subjugation party.

Immediately afterwards, the plants withered all at once, and the light that had been hidden under the leaves flowed to the northwest. Since I’d planted so many, the light was really bright, looking like a wave. The wave of light went down the side of the hill and disappeared into the building to the northwest as if it was being sucked inside.

A moment later, the entire building began to shine.

“It really was that b—” I started saying, only to be cut off by the sound of an explosion from inside that shook the ground. “Huh?”



The building exploded. Smoke rose from the spot where it used to be, along with the sparkling mana that had just been sucked inside. As I stood there watching the light fall like stars, Lord Glen spoke.

“Looks like it really was the cause of the mana drought. Since you planted so many seeds at once and it sucked all that mana up, the building exploded from the surplus.”

“Surplus...?”

I’d heard that the ground would rot if there was a surplus of mana, but not what would happen to anything else. I looked up at him, confused.

“*Think*. What would happen to a paper bag if you tried to force in more cookies than it could hold?”

“The cookies would break, and the bag would rip...” I answered, getting a nod.

“It’s the same thing. If you put too much mana into a magic stone, it’ll break. Or explode...to be precise,” he explained with a wry smile.

“You’re speaking from experience?”

Lord Glen quickly turned away. “Anyway—in the same fashion, putting too much mana into the water made it explode.”

So that’s how it works... While I nodded to myself, people started walking out of the ruins of the building. They were all in black clothing and wobbling, but it didn’t seem as if anyone was injured.

“Could they be the same people who attacked us while I was planting the Spirit sapling?” I asked, prompting Lord Glen to stare at them intently.

“‘Believers of the Proxy’... That’d make them from the same group.”

“Then we’ll need to take them into custody as soon as possible!” Lady Lilireina cried, overhearing our conversation. She immediately gave the subjugation party the order to arrest the men in black.

“They can teleport, so you should use Mana Sealing Bracelets,” Lord Glen suggested, getting a proud smile back from the kyewt.

“Already on it.”

Apparently, every soldier in the Martec Republic—and thus everyone in the subjugation party—carried mana sealing tools with them for arrests. They were probably able to provide enough thanks to Martec being the top magic-tool producer on the continent.

I remember hearing that they’re really hard to get...

“I’d love for all the knights in Chronowize to be able to carry them around,” Lord Glen commented as he looked at the party.

And with that, twelve Believers were quickly apprehended. Though the members of the subjugation party were strong enough to take down monsters, the Believers didn’t put up much of a fight, since

the explosion had made them all mana drunk. Being mana drunk caused the same effects as regular drunkenness. I'd never drunk alcohol before, so I wasn't exactly sure what those symptoms were—but all of the Believers were groaning in pain, so it must have been awful.

"We can't bring them all in like this, can we?" Lord Glen said, staring at the Believers with a bitter smile.

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While following the trail of glowing mana, we hadn't been walking on any tracks. This meant that we didn't have any wagons to bring the Believers back in, so a few members of the party were sent back to the capital to prepare some. In the meantime, we'd be interrogating the Believers with Lady Lilitreina as a witness.

The members of the subjugation party with the [Cure] Skill used it on the Proxy's Believers to lessen their mana drunkenness. I asked why they didn't just cure them completely, and Lord Glen gave me a grin.

"Keeping them a bit drunk makes it easier to get information out of them."

I nodded in understanding as the two of us made our way to where the Believers were held. Miss Micah was there, sitting straight up in a chair beside them. Behind her stood Lady Lilitreina.

Once Lord Glen and I arrived, the kyewt woman spoke. "Let's begin."

Miss Micah nodded. "Micah will now begin her [Interrogation]. Please answer in detail," she said, speaking in a different tone than usual as she used her Skill. [Interrogation] was a Skill that forced the questioned subject to answer. "Who are you?"

"We are believers in Our Lady, the Proxy!" one of the Believers shouted, somehow prompting another to start talking.

"We're juss makin' a place for Our Lady to descend. What gives?!" It seemed this Believer in particular was still pretty drunk, because he was slurring.

"What kind of place do you mean for her to descend upon?" asked Lord Glen.

"A country in peril, of course!" the drunken Believer screamed, laughing afterwards.

Lady Lilitreina started shaking with rage, but Lord Glen stopped her from doing anything.

"How are you putting the country in peril?" Miss Micah asked, only for another Believer to puff his chest up proudly.

"Hear and be amazed! We have invented a machine that allows us to collect mana in water!"

The rest of the Believers took this chance to explain their machine in detail. How long it took for them to come up with the idea, what metals were used, what magic was used... They were like children who were finally explaining something they'd been keeping secret. Maybe they'd wanted to explain all along, but just had no opportunity... They described things so meticulously that it seemed as if we could have gotten along fine without resorting to [Interrogation].

"And we used our machine to suck up all the mana 'round here! But then that weird light came in an' messed everythin' up," the still-drunk Believer said, looking towards another one. "What wassat, anyhow?"

The Believer who was questioned looked away, unable to answer.

"You know a lot about mana, don't you? What was it?"

"Even I don't know some things! I mean, I don't even know if that shiny stuff was mana, so how am I supposed to answer?!" the Believer angrily screeched. Then he started to talk about what happened when the light appeared. "I was just putting the mana in the water tank like usual until that weird light started coming in. It just kept coming and coming, and just when it got so bright that I had to close my eyes, it exploded."

"Were you hurt?" I asked, only for the angry Believer to smile softly at me.

"Thank you for worrying about us. We'd seen a lot of explosions during the machine's development, so we were all wearing magic tools to deal with them. That was why we weren't hurt. But yeah—even with magic tools to work against the explosions, we always end up mana drunk in the end." He cackled, no trace of anger left.

"How was your machine going to put the country in peril?" Miss Micah asked calmly, only for the Believer that spoke first to answer again.

"We were gonna suck up all of the mana in the country and cause a mana drought. That'd count as peril."

"Our scriptures say that Our Lady the Proxy will always descend on any country in peril."

"There have been more nonbelievers lately, so we decided we'd have Our Lady descend and show 'em She really exists."

"You caused a mana drought in my country for *that*?!" Lady Lilitreina fumed.

"Would the Proxy even appear?" I murmured, only for all the Believers to fall silent. Miss Micah repeated my question, using her [Interrogation] Skill.

"We don't know."

"Huh?"

The Believers started speaking up in desperation.

“If a country is in peril, Our Lady will definitely descend!”

“That’s what our teachings say!”

“All we needed to do was cause some peril for some country!”

“So you mean you had no idea...” I murmured.

They all looked at each other before averting their eyes. Now that it’d been proven that the Proxy’s Believers were the ones who had caused the mana drought in Martec, the members of the subjugation party were all pumped up. Or rather, they might have just been angry...

“We will do the crime scene investigation and further questioning ourselves,” one of them said, allowing us from Chronowize to leave first.

9. The Spirit Tree and Its Spirit

After leaving the place where the Mana Research Facility used to be, we returned to the Spirit Tree sapling to the south of the capital.

I told Ele all about what had happened while we were gone: how we'd planted Glowing Soil Improvement Seeds and followed the light to the source of the mana drought; how the cause of the drought had been a machine the Proxy's Believers built to gather mana inside water; how the seeds I'd created sent too much mana into the machine and it exploded from the excess. Ele had still been protecting the sapling, and he cackled after hearing my story.

"So you solved the root problem by blowing it up, hm? That's hilarious!" Ele said after he finished laughing, before looking towards the Spirit Tree sapling. "...But the mana drought remains."

I didn't need the [Appraisal] Skill for me to see how the sapling hadn't grown at all.

"It's being terribly annoying with its demands about improving the soil quality, so I would appreciate it very much if you'd plant your Soil Improvement Seeds quickly," he continued, sounding completely exhausted. Since the Spirit Tree had a will, it must have been giving him a lot of orders.

I giggled before using my Skill. "I'll make a handful of Soil Improvement Seeds—[Seed Creation]!"

With their usual light *pop*, a handful of tiny seeds appeared on my palm. I then planted the seeds along the outside edge of the staked-off area around the sapling. They immediately sprouted and spread their leaves, and after covering the entire area in greenery, they withered.

Since I'd just made normal, non-glowing seeds, we couldn't see the flow of the mana. *It should be okay since the source of the mana drought is gone...* I thought to myself, staring at the Spirit Tree sapling.

The sapling's branches began swaying back and forth, almost as if it was embarrassed. Then, it started shining brightly.

"You're growing, huh," I whispered. Seemingly in response, the sapling shined and started growing in earnest.

"It's amazing every time I see it," said Lord Glen. He wasn't shocked, since he and Miss Micah had been with me to see the Radzuel Empire's Spirit Tree grow.

Before we knew it, the shining subsided, and the tree had grown to be about as tall as the Royal Research Institute's second floor.

“It’s done~”

The moment the words left Miss Micah’s mouth, something started wafting out of the ground. The translucent yellow mass gradually took on a human form.

“Greetings, Princess. I am Gloucester, the Spirit of Earth.”

The Spirit Gloucester looked like a boy shorter than me, with fluffy dark-yellow hair, a perfectly fitting shirt and vest with yellow necktie, shorts that reached just above his knees, and leather shoes.

Nearby, Ele was making a weird face, but I paid it no mind.

“Princess...?” I murmured.

I’m the adopted daughter of Margrave Sargent, not a princess. Miss Micah’s the princess of the Radzuel Empire though. Thinking that, I looked over to Miss Micah, only for her to shake her head.

“The Storage Spirits refer to you as ‘princess,’ so I did as well. Was I mistaken?” Gloucester asked, head tilted.

“I’m not a princess, so I’d like for you to just call me Chelsea,” I answered clearly.

Gloucester’s gaze faltered for a moment before a smile blossomed on his face like a flower. “Understood. I shall call you Lady Chelsea.”

Ele was looking strange again. It almost seemed as if he was trying not to laugh. *I wonder why?*

“So you’ll be contracting with someone?” Lord Glen asked, getting a nod back.

“Yes. I must make a contract, but...” the Spirit of Earth said, looking all around before shaking his head. “It seems that the only person here I could contract with is Lady Chelsea.”

Seeing Gloucester’s shoulders slump sadly, Ele turned away, his shoulders quivering.

As we spoke, a dark shadow passed overhead. I looked up in surprise, and I saw a huge blue bird descending.

“Simurgh!” I called out, and the huge blue bird...Simurgh chirped happily, landing right beside the fully grown Spirit Tree.

I ran up to her, reaching towards her beak, and she leaned in.

<What’s wrong?> I asked telepathically.

<I came here wondering what the light was from, and you’ve grown the Spirit Tree. And I recognize the Spirit too,> she replied happily before walking towards Gloucester.

“Huh? Simurgh, bud! Long time no see! How ya been?” the Spirit asked her in a completely different tone than he’d used before.

Seeing my bewildered expression, Gloucester swore, covering his mouth with a hand.

“That is...his true self. He was only feigning politeness before,” Ele told us, barely containing his laughter.

“Jeez! Here I was, playing nice and getting on Lady Chelsea’s

good side, and then you had to come along and ruin it, Simurgh! You've gotta take responsibility!" Gloucester said, cheeks puffed like an angry child. He snapped his fingers, and all sound ceased. Everyone but Ele, Simurgh, and I froze in place.

Simurgh looked around in a panic, and I remembered that the same thing had happened when Lord Royz had contracted with Rene the Fire Spirit.

"Time stops when a Spirit is making a contract," I explained to Simurgh. She seemed to understand, and calmed down.

Ele, the Spirit King—and I, his contractor—watched over Simurgh and Gloucester.

"Kay, stick out your hand—er, foot, I mean."

The sacred bird followed his instructions, sticking her right foot out towards him.

"I'm Gloucester, the Spirit of Earth. I hereby form a contract with you!" he announced, as one of the claws on Simurgh's foot changed from black to yellow. She was so shocked, her beak was just hanging open. "Okay, we're done."

Snapping his fingers again, Gloucester disappeared, as if he'd melted into the ground. Sound returned, and I could see everyone around us moving again.

"The contract has been made. Summon him by calling his name... Or can you?" Ele asked Simurgh, tilting his head.

Simurgh just tilted her head back. She rested her beak on the top of my head, looking as if she wasn't sure what to do.

< Why not just try calling for him? > I suggested telepathically, and she let out a brief squawk.

After she did, something seemed to seep out of the ground and gather, forming a large horse with a dark yellow mane.

«What's uuuuuup?» the horse asked in Gloucester's voice.

"So squawks work..." Ele murmured seriously, staring at the horse.

A short while later, a carriage carrying Lady Lilitreina appeared. Nearly tripping over herself to get out, she took one look at the grown Spirit Tree, Gloucester in his horse form, and Simurgh the sacred bird—and promptly froze.

"Er... As I was returning to the capital, I saw a pillar of light and followed it here, but..." the kyewt woman said, tapering off as her gaze wandered in clear confusion.

"The pillar of light that you saw was the Spirit Tree growing," I told her, but it didn't seem to ease her concern.

"Frankly, this is all too much for me at once. Might I ask you to please explain things, one by one?!"

After nodding, we all started explaining.

“I shall start with the Spirit Tree. The sapling was whining about wanting the mana drought to be dealt with quickly, so I had Lady Chelsea plant her seeds.”

“After she did, there was enough mana in the soil, which made the Spirit Tree start glowing, and then it shot right up~!”

Lady Lillireina looked around blankly as Ele in his Spirit form and Miss Micah told her what happened.

“After the tree was fully grown, Gloucester the Spirit of Earth appeared... Then Simurgh came, having been startled by the light too,” I added, only for said sacred bird to chirp and squawk.

«She says she wasn’t startled. She just came to check it out,» Gloucester translated, but the only ones who could hear his voice were Lord Glen, Ele, and I.

“Normal people only hear your voice as neighing, Gloucester,” I explained, and the Spirit’s mouth gaped... If he were in humanoid form, he’d probably look as if he’d just realized.

Then, he started stomping in place. As he did, he gradually transformed from a horse to a humanoid Spirit. This time around he wasn’t translucent, and I could clearly see the edges around him. Still shorter than me, the young-looking boy’s soft dark-yellow hair fluttered in the wind.

“Now that I’m getting a good look at him, he’s a real hottie~!” Miss Micah commented, and I nodded in agreement.

The Spirit King Ele and Spirit of Fire Rene were both too gorgeous for words. But the Spirit of Earth Gloucester and Root the Communication Spirit were probably more on the cute side than pretty.

“If Simurgh’s my contractor, it might be better for me to stay in this form,” Gloucester, now looking more human-like, said with a smile.

Seeing him like that, Lady Lillireina covered her mouth with both hands, blushing.

“Wh-Wh-Who might this be?!” she stammered, her voice squeaking.

Though we’d explained what had happened, we hadn’t introduced Gloucester to her. I looked over to him as I thought that, and he had his hand up by his chin, thinking. As I wondered what I should do, he suddenly looked confused.

“And who is this woman?” Gloucester asked, tone going back to what he’d used when we first met.

“Ah, please excuse me. I am Lillireina, Chief Representative of the Martec Republic,” Lady Lillireina introduced herself, lifting both hands in welcome.

Hearing this, his expression suddenly bloomed into a smile. “I’m

shocked that the chief representative could be such a lovely lady.”

Ele made another funny face. Gloucester was probably playing things up to try to get Lady Lilireina to like him. Her blush deepened when she saw his smile, and she looked happy—almost enchanted.

“It seems Lady Lilireina has fallen for him,” Lord Glen commented quietly beside me.

So that’s what people act like when they’re in love?! I thought, shocked.

Miss Micah whispered to me from my other side. “You look like that sometimes when you’re looking at His Highness, y’know, Chelsea~?”

“...?!” I muffled my mouth with my hands. I realized I would blush and smile when I saw Lord Glen, but it was embarrassing to hear that I looked so bewitched! I observed Lilireina with a sense of secondhand embarrassment.

“I am Gloucester, the Spirit of Earth. Simurgh and I just entered a contract together, so I will always be in this country. Please, do treat me well.”

When she heard his proper introduction, Lady Lilireina tensed up. Then, after seeming conflicted, her expression changed, and she spoke. “Oh, Spirit of Earth, I have a request. The Martec Republic is currently suffering from a mana drought in our land. Please, make the land fertile... No, rather—if you could, please bring the land back to the level it once was!”

Her expression was no longer that of a girl in love, but the leader of a nation. Her desire to make the land fertile again had taken over once she learned that Gloucester was the Spirit of Earth.

Gloucester, on his part, groaned in thought.

“Could it be...that our land is already past the point of no return?” Lady Lilireina asked nervously, getting a shake of the head back from the Spirit.

“Even without my help, the land would return to its former state in a few years. If you’d like for it to recover even faster, you would need to deal with the mana drought,” he explained, looking apologetic before his gaze fell on me. “If the drought isn’t dealt with, nothing will grow, no matter how many nutrients I give the soil. That is why you would need Lady Chelsea to spread her seeds and reverse the mana drought first.”

“Lady Chelsea!” Lady Lilireina cried my name, rushing up to me. “Please, may I ask for your help bringing the Martec Republic’s blighted lands back to normal?!”

She’d said the same thing days before. Thinking back to that, I nodded.

“Understood.” She looked relieved to hear the same answer as

well.

Needing to tell the other representatives about the Spirit Tree, Gloucester the Spirit of Earth, and his contract with the sacred bird Simurgh, Lady Lilireina headed back to the capital's castle first. We stayed behind, planning to discuss how we would actually deal with the mana drought.

Having only recently appeared, Gloucester was unable to leave his Spirit Tree, so we would need to have our discussion here. But there were no chairs, so we'd all have to stay standing. Since I really wanted to be able to sit for our talk, I decided to make some.

"I'll make a Dining Set Seed with more chairs—[Seed Creation]!"

With the usual little *pop*, a coin-shaped seed appeared in the palm of my hand. I planted the seed, which had a table drawn on one side and ten chairs drawn on the other, in the ground a short distance from the Spirit Tree. It immediately grew to be taller than me, bearing fruit in the shape of a table and chairs.

Gloucester and Ele watched in shock.

"What the heck?! I've never seen anything like that!"

"In the countless years I've been alive, this is my first time seeing anything like that."

Lord Glen, Miss Micah, and the others had all seen me grow a Dining Set Seed back at Simurgh's roost, so they weren't surprised. Instead, they watched the Spirits' response, nodding in agreement.

We had the guard knights help harvest the table and chair fruit and set them all up. Then, we all sat down and started our discussion.

"So, how much mana would the soil need to remove the mana drought status?" Lord Glen started, looking towards Gloucester.

"It'd be fine if we just got it to shortage levels," the Spirit responded, tone changing again since Lady Lilireina was gone.

"Mana drought status is close to what you humans would refer to as death, while a mana shortage would be...unconsciousness. In essence, sleeping so that it may heal," Ele told us, elaborating on Gloucester's words.

"So the situation is so bad it can't even heal itself now..." I nodded, understanding it as similar to when Lord Royz was suffering from Mana Deficiency Disease.

"The number of seeds you planted around the Spirit Tree brought the entire area back from drought status to displaying nothing, so it's past shortage and right up to an abundance," Lord Glen said, his hand to his chin in thought. "This is just a guess, but if we wanted to get the entire country back to shortage levels like Gloucester wants, your mana levels are high enough that you could create the required number of seeds in five days."

Back when I was creating Blue Lily Seeds, it'd been awful, since I

had to make them one by one. But now that I could make as many as I wanted per cast, I'd have no problem so long as I watched my mana usage.

"That seems doable," I commented with a smile, only for Simurgh, who had been listening from beside Gloucester, to start chirping.

"Chiiiiirp? Chrrrrp."

I looked to Gloucester for a translation, and he laughed. "She said, 'Wouldn't it be faster to sow them from the sky? I'll help.'"

"Really?" I asked, tilting my head.

She rested her beak on top of my head. Realizing she wanted me to use my telepathy, I repeated the question. < Really? >

< Children shouldn't hold back. If I helped, you'd be finished within a day. Wouldn't that be great? >

We'd flown around the entire country on Simurgh's back before, and it hadn't taken long at all.

< You're right, it would be much faster to have you fly me, > I said in agreement.

She crooned happily and pulled away, going back to Gloucester's side.

"Then we'll have Simurgh help us out," Lord Glen confirmed, getting a nod back from the giant bird.

And so, it was decided that I'd sow the Soil Improvement Seeds around the Martec Republic with Simurgh's help.

+ + +

Six days later...

On the day we'd decided to plant the Soil Improvement Seeds around the country, I'd already used more than half of my mana. Every day since our discussion, under Lord Glen's supervision, I'd been using nearly my entire mana pool to create Soil Improvement Seeds. As a result, I'd managed to make enough seeds to fill a travel bag—big enough for me to hide in—to max capacity.

I stored the seed-stuffed bag in my Spirit storage. Then, Lord Glen and I hopped on Simurgh's back after she appeared near the Spirit Tree to the capital's south.

Right after we mounted her, I used my telepathy so we could all talk. Noticing that, Simurgh spoke inside my head.

< Let's just make sure of what we're all doing. >

Both Lord Glen and I nodded to each other.

< I just need to fly in a spiral pattern out from the tree. >

< I'll be holding on to Chelsea so she won't fall. >

< And I'll just be throwing seeds everywhere. >

The three of us naturally dissolved into giggles after we all confirmed our roles.

< We should get going then! > Simurgh said, flapping her wings and flying into the sky.

The view from above was exactly as it had been before, with not a single bit of greenery to be seen. I once again understood that just destroying the Mana Research Facility hadn't solved the mana drought issue in the least.

< This should be high enough, shouldn't it? > asked Simurgh, once we'd reached a certain elevation.

< I'll start throwing the seeds, > I said, willing my Spirit Tree Bracelet to give me back the seed-stuffed bag from my storage. As I did, the huge, two-handled travel bag appeared in front of me.

I opened the top, shoved both hands inside, and scooped the Soil Improvement Seeds up. Just bringing them out of the bag made them blow away in the wind. Taking care to try not to hit Lord Glen or Simurgh with too many seeds, I opened my hands and dropped them.

As soon as the seeds hit the ground, they sprouted and started spreading their leaves. Since I'd dropped them from the sky, it was as if it was raining round spots of green carpet around everywhere. After sprouting, the seeds immediately withered. *The mana collected in their roots must have dispersed.*

But as soon as I thought that, the ground where they'd withered turned green again.

< Huh? > I thought in surprise as I looked down, only for Simurgh to chuckle in amusement.

< Oh my, looks like the slumbering plant life's returning to normal. Amazing. >

The Soil Improvement Seeds I'd created were to deal with the soil's mana drought status. They shouldn't have helped anything actually grow. If plants had suddenly started growing again, it had to have been Gloucester using his powers as the Spirit of Earth.

< Could it be Gloucester's doing? >

< I wonder... > Simurgh answered vaguely.

I was still throwing the seeds as we spoke, while Lord Glen stayed silent, just looking down at the ground.

For three hours, I kept sowing the seeds. As a result, the Martec Republic's mana drought-blighted land had become completely covered in greenery. Looking closely, I could even see leaves growing on the withered trees.

< Amazing... >

Simurgh cackled at my murmur. < Amazing? You were the one who did it! >

< All I did was sow the seeds. The one who made the land green again was Gloucester... >

< But didn't he say that he couldn't do that until the mana

drought was dealt with? Be more confident in yourself. >

Now that she said it like that, she might have been right. Feeling somewhat strange, we headed back to the Spirit Tree.

10. The Saintess of Abundance

Once I was finished sowing all of the seeds, we returned to the Spirit Tree to the south of the capital. Lord Glen helped me down off of Simurgh's back as Miss Micah, who had been waiting for us, waved.

"We're back," I announced, and Miss Micah gave me a bright smile in return.

"Welcome back~!" she answered, walking up to me and pulling a brush out of her Item Box to fix my slightly wind-messed hair.

"Thank you."

"Micah's your personal chef-slash-maid, so this is no biggie~!" she said, puffing her chest out proudly. Ele was perched on her shoulder in cat form.

"Huh? You're not in Spirit form anymore?"

«I feel more comfortable in this form,» replied Ele, hopping from Miss Micah's shoulder to mine.

Since he usually only changed into Spirit form when fighting, I honestly felt more comfortable with him in cat form too.

Gloucester stood near the Spirit Tree in his humanoid Spirit form, smiling happily at me. "I was watching from the top of the tree, and everything quickly became green!"

"Your powers are amazing, Gloucester," I replied, somewhat distantly.

He shook his head and said, "I didn't do anything."

"Huh?"

From Simurgh's back, I'd seen plants growing from the spots where the Soil Improvement Seeds had withered. *So that wasn't Gloucester?* I thought, head tilted in confusion, only for him to do the same.

"I'm the Spirit of Earth, not the Spirit of Plants."

I knew that, since he'd always introduced himself as the Spirit of Earth. *What does he mean though?* As I tilted my head again, he blinked at me.

"As the Spirit of Earth, I can shape the ground, give it nutrients...make metals, ores, and gems—stuff like that. Nothing more."

«Making plants grow is the domain of the Spirit of Plants,» Ele elaborated from his spot on my shoulder.

"But grass started growing as soon as the seeds withered, and the

dead trees are healthy again too..." I said, telling them what I'd seen of the grass and trees from my spot on Simurgh's back.

Gloucester simply smiled and said, "I was here waiting by the Spirit Tree the whole time. How the heck do you think I could grow stuff so far away?" I really had thought he could do it, but it seemed I was wrong. "The plant-growing thing was from the Soil Improvement Seeds you made, Lady Chelsea."

"The seeds you'd made before didn't have that effect, but you made them this time while wishing to make the Martec Republic fertile again... So they just worked exactly as you wished," murmured Lord Glen from his spot beside me, hand to his mouth in thought.

"True story, I was planning on running around the country in horse form once the mana drought had been resolved, and giving nutrients to the land. Would've been a pain in the butt though, so I didn't wanna do it. But you saved me the trouble!" said Gloucester, a smile blossoming on his face.

As we spoke, I could hear the sound of a carriage coming to a stop. It was Lady Lilibreina, who got out and ran at us full speed. The elven man working as her attendant followed behind, telling her to slow down, but she wasn't listening.

"I saw the sacred bird descending from the watchtower, so I came to see!" Simurgh hadn't hidden herself as she flew this time, so it seemed she saw us land near the Spirit Tree. "Lady Chelsea, Spirit of Earth, Lady Sacred Bird! Thank you so very much for saving our country!" she proclaimed, both hands raised as she came to a stop in front of us.

Simurgh squawked crankily.

"Simurgh believes she had nothing to do with any of it. She was merely flying through the sky," Gloucester answered politely. Since Lady Lilibreina was here, he was acting like a nice boy... "Also, I had no hand in it either."

"Huh?" She looked at the Spirit, confused.

"I am the Spirit of Earth..." he began, before giving her the same explanation he'd given us before about not being the Spirit of Plants and being unable to grow them.

Once he was finished, Lady Lilibreina looked at me intently.

"So you mean to say...that this was all Lady Chelsea's doing... Yes?"

Everyone present but me nodded.

"Why, it's such a grand achievement that she could be called 'Saintess of Abundance!'" Gloucester said, smiling.

Lady Lilibreina exclaimed, "We witnessed the birth of a saint?! Amazing! We absolutely must hold a celebratory party!"

And then, with the same intensity as she came in with, the kyewt

woman ran back to her carriage and rode off towards the capital.

I stood there dumbfounded. Miss Micah tilted her head, confused, and asked, “What’d she mean by the birth of a saint~?”

“I really have no idea,” I replied, just as confused as she was.

Lord Glen suddenly looked surprised, staring above my head.

“You have ‘Saintess of Abundance’ as an alias now, Chelsea.”

“An...alias? Is it different from a title?”

He nodded. “A title is like a class, and has some kind of effect. For example, since you have the ‘Contractor of the Spirit King’ title, you know where Ele is at all times.”

He was right. I could tell which direction Ele was in no matter how far apart we were. And now that Lord Glen mentioned it, I remembered how getting the ‘Savior of the Radzuel Empire’ title had given me the ability to read a book that only beastmen could read.

“An alias is a second name, and doesn’t have any real effect... You’ll get treated like royalty, and you might end up surrounded by people if you go by it...”

By “end up surrounded,” does he mean like by nobles at a party?
Though I didn’t quite understand, we all headed back to the castle.

+ + +

The next morning, an elven maid—different from the one whom I’d been in the care of since arriving in the Republic—woke me up.

“Good morning, Your Ladyship, the Saintess of Abundance. Allow me to help you dress.”

The elven maid was moving just as briskly as the head maid in Chronowize did. This woman might’ve been the head maid of the Martec Republic’s palace.

I just followed along, getting ready for the morning and eating a simple breakfast. After that, the elven maid brought a gown and dressed me in it. The fact that I would be wearing a gown rather than a normal dress made me realize something had to be coming later.

“Now, please allow me to show you to the drawing room, where your later plans will be discussed.”

I nodded, and we immediately headed towards the drawing room. As we walked, people started appearing in the hallway, and they all bowed deeply at me. Up until today, the only people I’d ever see while I traveled through the halls were soldiers on patrol or standing guard. I’d never even seen any maids.

While I was thinking how strange this all was, we arrived at the drawing room. When the door was opened, not only was Lady Lilitreina present as the chief representative, but there were tons of other representatives there blocking the windows. On the opposite sofa was Lord Glen, with Miss Micah and the guard knights standing

behind him. *There are a lot of people from the Martec Republic here...*

"Please excuse me. I have brought Her Ladyship, the Saintess of Abundance," announced the elven maid, leading me over to Lord Glen's side.

After exchanging brief greetings, I sat down on the sofa—only for Lord Glen to immediately put his arm around my waist. I looked up at him in surprise, and he whispered in a voice so quiet no one else could hear, "...Telepathy."

Making sure not to let my concern show on my face, I used my telepathy.

< Good morning, Lord Glen. >

< Good morning, Chelsea. Did you sleep well last night? >

< Yes, like a baby. >

My absolutely normal response softened his expression.

"We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for saving the Martec Republic," Lady Lilireina said, standing and throwing both arms into the air. All of the other representatives behind her threw their arms up as well.

I thought that the arm thing was a Martec-style greeting, but I guess they also use it to express gratitude. As soon as I thought that, Lord Glen's other hand shot up to hide his mouth as he held back his laughter.

< Oh... My telepathy was still on... >

It seemed that Lord Glen had heard my thoughts, and found them so funny that he couldn't help but laugh.

< So that's how you think. I'm happy to see a different side of you. >

"Now, on to our future plans..." Lady Lilireina continued. "We'd like for you to allow us to redo things from the day of your arrival."

Unsure of what she meant, I tilted my head.

"What exactly do you mean?" asked Lord Glen.

The kyewt woman sat up straight, and replied, "I'll be honest. Originally, we'd planned to throw a welcome-slash-commemorative party for your planting of the Spirit Tree on the day of your arrival."

< Oh yeah, we were immediately sent to plant the cutting as soon as we'd arrived, weren't we...? >

< They did say that they were gonna throw a huge celebratory party. >

My thoughts had gone through as telepathy again. *Forget it. I'll just listen to what they say and keep chatting telepathically with Lord Glen.*

"A welcome party, a party to commemorate the planting of the Spirit Tree cutting, a party to celebrate the appearance of our sacred bird, a party to celebrate Lady Chelsea's safe return, a party to celebrate getting rid of the cause of the mana drought, a party to

celebrate the land becoming fertile again, a party to commemorate the birth of a new saint, a goodbye party... Really, we had so many parties in store..." Lady Lilitreina explained, looking frustrated.

< Could it just be that the people of the Martec Republic love celebrating things? >

< Looks like it. The other representatives behind her look just as disappointed. >

Looking behind Lady Lilitreina, it was true that all the other representatives looked sad.

"I suggested that we consolidate them all into one, but..."

"No, if we consolidated them, we'd only be throwing one party total."

"Yes, we should be throwing even more parties than you said."

"If we could even split them into a few day's worth..." Lady Lilitreina began.

The other representatives all responded negatively to her suggestion.

"As you can see, we cannot come to a consensus. After worrying about what to do, we decided that we'd just ask all of you from Chronowize how many parties you'd like thrown."

The moment she said that, the other representatives' eyes started shining.

< What should we do? > I asked, looking towards Lord Glen.

With his hand to his chin, he fell into thought for a moment.

"In truth, we've already stayed much longer than we originally planned, so we'd like to skip the parties and just return..."

Before Lord Glen could even finish what he was saying, one of the representatives—a dwarven man—collapsed to his knees, crying. "No party... But then we have no excuse to drink!"

< Oh, that's right. All three races love drinking, don't they? >

< Parties thrown by people who love drinking tend to last late into the night, if not until dawn. You're a minor, so they wouldn't make you drink, but... >

Apparently, the thought of not having even a single party hadn't even crossed the representatives' minds, because they'd all gone pale, including Lady Lilitreina.

"E-Even just a single party..." the kyewt woman begged as the other representatives all nodded along.

"What do you all think?" Lord Glen asked, turning towards Miss Micah and the guard knights, who had been standing behind us. Seeing them all nod, he chuckled. "What do you think, Chelsea?" he continued, looking at me, and adding telepathically, < Since you can't drink, it would be fine for you to just say no to any parties. >

I smiled brightly and answered, "I would like to see what parties

in the Martec Republic are like, so I will attend just one.”

All of the representatives heaved sighs of relief at my words.

“Then we’ll have a single party,” Lord Glen said conclusively, getting a nod of acknowledgment back from Lady Lilitreina.

And so, that night, they rolled a myriad of parties into one huge celebration. I couldn’t drink, since I was underage, but everyone else was old enough that they could drink in moderation.

I heard afterwards that the alcohol in the Martec Republic was apparently a lot higher quality than that of Chronowize. This was because it was the handiwork of both the dwarves and elves. Once I became old enough, I wanted to have at least one sip of it.

Epilogue

The day after the party, we all were running about getting ready for the trip back home. Miss Micah had gone to buy our food, accompanied by Ele in his cat form, while Lord Glen and I were buying souvenirs. Afterwards, we would head for the Spirit Tree.

“We leave tomorrow, so make sure you don’t forget anything you want to buy.”

“Okay.”

As we chatted, we stepped out of the carriage near the street filled with shops. Every store was built from bricks and had big, elaborate signs.

From a shop selling accessories and other little things, I bought lots of scarves, hair ornaments, and decorative cords. Next, we went to a bookstore, where I bought plant encyclopedias and cookbooks. I also grabbed a few books I thought might help with my Skill research that we didn’t have back in Chronowize.

Just as we were leaving the store, I accidentally bumped into a little dwarven girl.

“Sorry.”

We quickly apologized to each other and went our separate ways. For some reason though, people were staring at me. I took Lord Glen’s hand and started a telepathic conversation.

< People are staring all of a sudden... >

< They don’t seem hostile though. The stares seem kind of positive—or like, curious and envious, > Lord Glen replied as he glanced around, having noticed the gazes as well.

As we wondered to ourselves, a shopkeeper from a nearby doughnut shop came up to us holding a paper bag.

“Seeing as you have a blue feather from our sacred bird, you must be the Saintess of Abundance. Thank you so much for bringing our country’s land back to life,” she said, pushing the paper bag into my arms. “These are some freshly fried donuts. Please, eat them with your companions.”

I quickly looked down at my chest and saw the blue feather from Simurgh that should have been hidden under my coat. It must have been knocked into view when I bumped into the little girl. I rushed to hide it, but it was already too late...

“So that really is Her Holiness the Saintess of Abundance! I was

thinkin' it must be, with the feather and all! Have some cookies to celebrate our meeting!"

"It's thanks to you that the withered-up apple trees in the orchard are all healthy again, Lady Saintess! Thank you so, so much! Here... It's apple jam!"

"To think a kid young enough for our sacred bird to choose saved our country... Please, take these meat skewers."

Since they were all giving me things with the best of intentions, I couldn't refuse. Before I knew it, my arms were completely full of bags of food...

"I'm so sorry, I wouldn't be able to eat any more than this..." I apologized, and the group of people had no choice but to back off.

While I stood there in relief, Lord Glen took the majority of the bags from me.

"Since we're done with buying our souvenirs, let's head to the Spirit Tree," he said.

I nodded, and we headed for the carriage waiting for us nearby. Once we reached it, Lord Glen spoke again, with a serious expression.

"I was listening to everyone talking while you were getting food forced on you. It seems that the fact was announced that a young human girl with light-pink hair and Simurgh's blue feather is the Saintess of Abundance."

The night before at the celebratory party, I was introduced as the Saintess at the same time as I was introduced as a research fellow from the Kingdom of Chronowize. And if there was an announcement, that must've meant that everyone in the Martec Republic knew.

"Will I be called the Saintess of Abundance wherever I go? Will I keep getting mobbed and given food...?" I whispered worriedly, only for Lord Glen to pat me on the back.

"It seemed like you having the feather was what blew your cover, so you should be fine as long as you keep it hidden," he said, and I nodded back.

A while later, we arrived near the Spirit Tree to the south of the capital. Stepping out of the carriage, we noticed that there were metal walls surrounding the tree. As we got closer, we saw Martec soldiers standing around the wall's perimeter. The moment they noticed us, they bowed reverently and led us to a gate through the wall.

Passing through the gate, we found the Spirit Tree still in the center of a square, staked-off area. Sitting in a chair beside it was Gloucester in his humanoid Spirit form.

He greeted us with a smile and a wave. "Welcome."

"Where did this wall come from?" I asked. "It wasn't here the day before."

Gloucester's expression turned mild, and he said, "I figured some

kinda dummy'd pop up and try to take the tree sometime soon, so I put up iron walls to make it harder to get to. I had them place some guards here too."

That makes sense, since we'd been attacked by villains when the Spirit Tree was first planted. It's probably important to put more security around it, I thought.

"I was thinking the same, so I came to put up a barrier," Lord Glen added.

Now that he mentioned it, I knew we'd planned to come to the Spirit Tree, but I didn't know the reason for the visit.

Looking up at the tree, he cast, "Putting up a barrier around the Spirit Tree... *Barrier...*"

I couldn't see the actual barrier, but it seemed that Gloucester could. His cheeks went red as he exclaimed, "Amazing! This is the first time I've ever seen a barrier this complex and strong! And you even thought about when the tree'll grow and left some room! Nice job, man!"

The Spirit's eyes were positively sparkling.

After Lord Glen's barrier was up, we decided to eat the food I'd been given. We lined up everything on the table I'd created days earlier. I'd already put all the things that wouldn't expire for a long time in my Item Box, but...

"Looks like you got even more food than you did before," Lord Glen quipped, a wry smile on his face.

"Since we won't be able to finish it all, let's give some to the Storage Spirits again this time too."

"Sounds like a good idea."

I nodded at Lord Glen's agreement, then I noticed Gloucester staring at the food on the table.

"Can I have some too?"

"Of course. I'm sharing it with everyone."

Gloucester looked thrilled, grabbing a meat skewer from right in front of him. Lord Glen took a toasted sandwich, while I took a normal sandwich. After we'd all chosen what we wanted to eat, I sent the rest to my storage for the Spirits there.

"Man, it's been ages since I last ate food from the human world... Couple hundred years, maybe? Not too sure," Gloucester commented, stuffing his face with meat.

"Um... How old are you, Gloucester?" I asked, tilting my head.

"I was born second, after King Element, so way older than you can even count."

"So a Spirit's age doesn't match their appearance, huh..."

The Spirit of Earth nodded. "Our growth stops when we hit the age we're at our strongest. Our temporary forms... My horse form,

yeah? That changes based on how much mana our contractor has.”

Back when I first contracted with Ele, he looked like a kitten. Little by little he kept growing. And by the time I returned to the capital of Chronowize, he looked like a proper adult cat.

So it was based on my mana levels!

And so, we chatted like that as we enjoyed our snacks. Just about when we were full, a soft light came flying out of the Spirit Tree Bracelet on my left hand and morphed into a tiny person the size of my thumb.

«Long time no see, Lady Chelsea! I have a message from the Storage Spirits. ‘Thank you for the food. It was delicious,’» said Root the Communication Spirit, flapping his butterfly-like wings and landing on the back of my hand.

“It really has been a while,” I replied, only for him to put his hands on his hips, cheeks puffed.

«It was only that long because you never called for me!» he cried, pouting angrily. «I can’t come to this world without having a reason!»

He looked so cute that I couldn’t help but smile. “I’m sorry. I’ll make sure to call you over a bit more regularly from now on.”

«Call for me a lot, okay!» he said, flying circles around me.

“Little Spirit, could you be contracted to Lady Chelsea?”

«Yep! Not only contracted, but she also gave me the name ‘Root’! Cool, huh!»

“Super cool, and a nice name! Make sure to treasure it.”

«I will!» Gloucester’s compliment seemed to cheer Root up, and the tiny Spirit landed on my hand again, clinging to my pointer finger. «Ah, Lady Chelsea, you’ve been using your telepathy lots. I can tell from how used to the power you are.»

I’d only been using it with Simurgh and Lord Glen, but I might’ve been using it pretty frequently.

«When you get used to it, you’ll be able to talk with those you’ve touched and used telepathy with, except without even touching. So use it a lot!»

Lord Glen and I looked at him blankly.

“How many times would she have to use it to be able to speak telepathically without touching? And from exactly how far away?” he asked, seeming really interested.

Root crossed his arms in thought. «Hmm... No clue. So try it!»

Thus, we decided to test if I could use telepathy without touching first. Lord Glen and I sat on opposite sides of the table.

“I’m going to start,” I announced, before speaking to him in his mind. <Can you hear me?>

<I can!> he replied, smiling happily.

«You must’ve really used it lots and lots to be able to use it like

that already!» said Root, also happy as he flew circles around us.

“Next, we should check how far it will work... I’ll try speaking to Simurgh,” I said, before using my telepathy to speak to the sacred bird. <Hello, this is Chelsea using telepathy. Can you hear me? >

I said my name too, since I figured she might be surprised to suddenly hear a voice. I waited a moment without hearing any answers before speaking again.

<Apparently I can use it from a distance once I use it enough. Can you hear me? >

<And here I was thinking I was hearing things! You’re full of nothing but surprises, girlie,> Simurgh replied, her voice sounding higher-pitched than usual.

<We’re testing how far away it will work. Where are you right now? >

<I’m just resting in my roost. >

When I repeated her answer to Lord Glen, he was shocked.

“So it works even from two days on horseback away. We should test to see if it’ll work even farther later,” he said, before jumping in realization. “Do you think all three of us could talk without touching?”

All three of us had been able to speak telepathically to each other while I was touching both of them. If we could do it without touch, then...

“I’ll try right now!” I said, imagining the both of them as I focused. Excitedly, I asked, <Is this working? >

Lord Glen broke into a smile from the other side of the table, and replied, <I can hear you. >

<Oh, I can hear Glen now too. You really do the neatest things, Chelsea. >

After that, we added Gloucester to the conversation. I then told them all about the party the night before, and how Lord Glen and I were mobbed in town since I was the Saintess of Abundance.

<Ah, there’s something I need to tell you,> I said, pausing slightly. <We’ll be leaving tomorrow. >

<What, seriously?! > Gloucester screeched.

<Quite sudden, huh,> said Simurgh, sounding relaxed. <Take care not to get hurt or sick on the way. I should have added a monster-repellent effect to the feather I gave you. You haven’t forgotten anything, have you? Make sure to double-check. And... >

The sacred bird’s chatter got even faster as she worried about this and that.

<You’re leaving, Lady Chelsea? No, no, noooo! > Gloucester cried, having a tantrum and rolling around on the ground.

Seeing how different their responses were, I giggled.

< Can't you just use the Spirit Tree to come visit her whenever you want, Gloucester? > asked Lord Glen.

The Spirit immediately stopped rolling, and stood up again. < Oh, that's true! And since I'm contracted with Simurgh, she can also go through the Spirit Tree to visit Lady Chelsea's country! >

< Oh, really? That would be wonderful, > Simurgh commented happily.

< We came to say goodbye, but we can see each other whenever we want, huh? > I said, only for Lord Glen to chuckle.

< You've seemed down since after the party, after all. >

< We've got a whole other country between Chronowize and Martec, so I was worried I'd never see them again. >

< What are you saying, girlie? If you burn the feather I gave you, we could see each other anytime. >

< But wouldn't it burn up completely as soon as I set it on fire? > I asked, touching the blue feather hidden under my coat.

Simurgh laughed. < What are you saying? You think a feather of mine would burn up from any old flame? Try burning it right now. >

Following her words, I took it off my chest and held it by the shaft. Then, I had Lord Glen set the fluffy tip on fire with magic. After it burned a little tiny bit, the flame disappeared. Soon after, the space near us warped, and Simurgh appeared.

While I sat there in shock, she chirped happily.

< Didn't Glen tell you that burning it would summon me? Now, give the feather another good once-over. >

I glanced back down at the blue feather in my hand and realized that the bit that had burnt was reformed back to how it'd been before.

< So I can see the both of you whenever I want... Thank goodness, > I murmured in relief.

Simurgh set her beak on the top of my head. < You're like my granddaughter now. I'll always be worrying about you, and you can ask me for help anytime. >

My chest warmed up at her words.

+ + +

The next day, we hopped into our carriage at the break of dawn, leaving the capital of the Martec Republic behind. Lady Liliireina had wanted to give me a grand send-off as the Saintess of Abundance, but I refused out of embarrassment.

The view as our carriage rolled on towards home was all green, quite unlike our initial arrival. I'd wanted to do something about it back then, and I actually had. It made me feel so happy.

«We've only the Spirits of Water and Wind left...» Ele muttered, currently in his cat form.

“So basically, two more countries,” Lord Glen said, getting a nod back.

Unless the Spirit Trees were planted a country’s distance away from each other, the four great Spirits couldn’t appear in our world.

“I’m excited about what country will be next.”

“It’d be nice if there was a response waiting for us back in Chronowize,” agreed Lord Glen, only for Ele to groan in worry.

«Even if the response was positive, it will take time to create another cutting for planting. Take the opportunity to rest back in your country.»

“Rest, huh...” said Lord Glen, putting a hand to his chin before looking at me. “What do you want to do when we get back?”

“First...I’d like to hand out our souvenirs.”

“Tris’ll want to know everything that happened, after all.”

“Miss Gina and Miss Martha will be looking forward to you coming home, Chelsea~!”

“Marx’d probably cry if we didn’t mention him too.”

“That’s true...” I murmured.

“What else do you want to do?”

“Study my Skill more. Back in Martec, I learned about lots of other things I could do—like create plants with food inside their fruit, and making lots of seeds at once,” I replied, clenching my fists tight, and getting smiles back from Lord Glen and Miss Micah.

“You’re always progressing, Chelsea~ It’s fun to be with you~!”

“You’re a lot more motivated than you were when we first met. Micah’s right, it is fun.”

“That’s all thanks to the two of you being with me, and Ele too.”

«I’m an afterthought?» Ele said, pouting. So I gave him lots of pets.

Side Stories

1. Let's Learn Magic

In the carriage on the way back to Chronowize from Martec...

"Lord Glen... Would it be possible for you to teach me how to use magic?"

Thinking back to Simurgh's roost, I had no problem with getting food or having a place to sleep, but there was just one thing that I couldn't do. I decided to ask about it.

"Okay. What spell do you want to learn?" Lord Glen replied instantly, turning to me.

"I'd like to learn how to use *Clean*," I said, and he nodded in understanding.

Smiling, he said, "Oh yeah, that's a handy spell to know. Let's get learning, then."

That's the same smile my manners teacher had before mercilessly drilling into a lesson! I straightened myself, head nodding up and down.

"Relax, it's okay, Chelsea. I'm sure you'll pick it up in no time," said Lord Glen before explaining the basic theory of spellcasting. "Do you know what you need to use magic?"

Back when we first met, he'd told me that my mana pool was too small, and that I didn't have enough mana to cast anything.

Remembering that, I answered, "Mana?"

"You're half-right. To cast spells, you need mana *and* imagination," he said, tapping his head with a finger. "To cast *Clean*, you need to clearly visualize how clean you want something—and in what way—before your spell will go off."

How clean you want it, and in what way... I thought, then said, "Like...imagining yourself scrubbing in the bath?"

"Yep. Once you have a clear image in your head, all you need to do is say the spell name to cast it.

Doing just as he instructed, I gestured towards my chest as I said the spell name. "*Clean*..."

As soon as I cast it, my body glistened briefly. Since there hadn't been any visible dirt on me, I had no idea if it had worked. *How am I supposed to know?*

Lord Glen spoke up as I wondered. "With *Clean*, you'll know it worked if the object lights up," he explained, and I sighed in relief. "The more you use it, the easier it gets to cast. It's the same with

every spell.”

“Then I’ll need to practice a lot,” I replied, deciding to cast it on the clothes I was wearing. “*Clean...*”

I imagined my clothes when they were brand new, with not a single wrinkle, then imagined them being washed and ironed as I cast. My clothes then lit up in the same way as my body had. Only instead of just being clean, they looked absolutely new.

“Amazing. Even I can’t get things that clean,” murmured Lord Glen in surprise.

“Really?”

“Watch as I try... *Clean...*” he whispered, casting the spell on his own clothes. They lit up, so I knew it worked, but I couldn’t see exactly how it had worked. “The dirt’s all off of them, but they’re nowhere near as clean as yours. Can you try to cast it on my clothes too?”

“All right... *Clean...*” I held my hand out towards his clothing as I cast. *They must’ve been completely brand new and wrinkle-free at some point.*

As I thought that and imagined them being cleaned, they glowed, then appeared as good as new.

“Huh?” I gasped. *I didn’t expect there to be such a difference!*



“See? Do you get how I was so surprised?”

I nodded. Suddenly, Miss Micah, who had just been silently watching us talk, spoke up.

“You’re only thinking of it getting clean, Your Highness~!” she said. “Chelsea imagines not only the action of it being cleaned, but how it’ll look. That’s why it looks brand new~!”

“Oh yeah, I wasn’t thinking of wrinkles or anything like that. So that’s why it’s so different...” Lord Glen said, nodding as he looked over his clothes.

“Chelsea’s good at imagining things thanks to her Skill~ She’s amazing~!”

Hearing Miss Micah’s praise made me happy.

“Want to try out some other spells?” Lord Glen asked.

“Yes, of course!”

And so, since we had such a long journey to Chronowize’s capital, I spent that day and the next few learning *Fireball* and *Ice Arrow*. I’d use *Fireball* to light the fire when we camped, and aimed *Ice Arrow* into a cup to chill drinks. Both of the spells were for attacking, but learning how they could be used for mundane purposes made me want to try learning even more magic.

2. A Thank-You Gift

I wanted to give Lord Glen something as thanks for teaching me how to use magic, but I had no idea what he’d want. I searched for something in every town we stopped in, but nothing seemed right. After worrying about it for days, I decided to do something for him as thanks instead.

“I’d like to show my appreciation for teaching me magic, but...there isn’t much I can do aside from making seeds. Are there any seeds you’d like for me to create?” I asked.

He stared at me for a moment, unsure how to answer.

“Well, you really don’t have to thank me. But there *is* a seed I’d like for you to create, so I’ll take you up on your offer,” he said, pulling a picture book out of his Item Box. “This book is about a boy’s dream of building a tree house after planting a tree.”

“What is a...tree house?” I asked, having no idea.

Lord Glen opened the book and flipped to a picture. “It’d be a little house or a hideout up on top of a tree.”

As I looked at the book, Miss Micah leaned over to see from her spot across from me. “I know this book~! It’s interesting. They have a kitchen and a chimney up in a tree~!”

It seemed her words made Ele curious, because he got up and

looked at the book too.

"I thought maybe you'd be able to create a seed that grows into a tree house," Lord Glen said. "Would that work for a request?"

"Yes, as long as we make a blueprint," I replied excitedly, giving him a nod.

+ + +

Almost immediately after that, we stopped to give the horses a rest.

Lord Glen pulled the book back out of his Item Box, along with a piece of paper and a pen.

"Okay, let's make up a blueprint, then."

Under the watchful gazes of the guard knights, Lord Glen, Miss Micah, Ele in his Spirit form, and I all sat together and started thinking. Ele seemed interested in the concept of a tree house, so he'd returned to his Spirit form so that Miss Micah could understand what he was saying.

"First up would be the tree's height. It'd be hard to climb up to if the tree was as tall as it is in the book, so why don't we base it on something like that?" Lord Glen suggested, pointing towards the forest near the rest stop. The trees there seemed to be about as tall as the third floor of the Royal Research Institute, and the branches looked thick and strong.

"That seems like a good idea," I said, writing "Height: third floor of Royal Research Institute" on the blueprint.

"Next we've gotta figure out how high up we want the tree house to be~ It's hard to choose between close to the ground and way up high~!"

"Wouldn't growing the tree house closer to the ground defeat the entire purpose?" Ele commented. "I would enjoy it more if it was up high, and with a good view."

"You're right~!"

"Then how about we make it so the tree house is about halfway up the tree?" I suggested, getting nods from everyone present.

"That'd be about four meters up... Maybe it'd be better to make a *staircase* up rather than a *ladder*," said Lord Glen, using words I'd never heard. He then wrote "attach staircase" on the blueprint.

"What'll we do for how it looks~?"

"It would be really heavy if it was made out of logs."

"Then it should be made out of wooden boards," Ele said, effortlessly drawing a house with a size that could easily fit four beds on the blueprint.

My jaw dropped, and Lord Glen just blinked.

"So Ele can draw..." he said.

Both Lord Glen and I weren't very good artists. In fact, we were actually awful. We were both shocked, having thought Miss Micah was the only one present who had any skill in drawing.

"If you live long enough, you end up able to do nearly anything," Ele asserted.

"So it's a matter of practice... I'll have to try harder then," Lord Glen said with a wry smile in response to Ele's words.

"Do not look at my art. Think of what will go inside the tree house," Ele said, waving a hand at both of us. He looked unhappy, but he was probably just bashful.

After giggling, I looked towards the picture book, then asked, "Oh, should we put a kitchen and a stove inside?"

Lord Glen shook his head. "Let's start off with just an empty room first. If you thought about furniture and everything, it'd be a pain to write down on the blueprint, not to mention having to imagine it."

He was right. I'd be imagining the finished product to make the seed after we were done with the blueprint, and I might not be able to remember everything if there are too many details.

"It should also be a single generation, as per usual," Ele proposed.

"And if we have it wither and die with a certain signal, we could use it for camping instead of tents," suggested Lord Glen, agreeing with the Spirit.

We normally stayed at inns in the villages and towns we passed through—but when they're too far away from each other, or there were no inns available, we'd camp. Camping meant pitching tents and sleeping inside them, but it wasn't a comfortable sleep at all. If we could sleep in a tree house instead, it might be a lot more comfortable.

"That's a great idea!" I agreed quite vigorously, with Miss Micah nodding and wagging her tail beside me.

"I'll write that down," said Lord Glen, holding back his laughter.

"Is there anything else?" I asked the group, only for one of the guard knights who had been silently watching over us to raise a hand.

"May I have permission to speak?" he asked.

Normally, the guard knights stayed out of everything, including conversation. It was rare for them to ask to speak. I tilted my head in wonder, while Lord Glen gave him his permission.

"If this tree house would be used as an alternative to tents, would it be possible to create a place for a lookout, so that we could notice any enemies approaching all the sooner?"

"I see... That's a guard's opinion. Great idea. I'll allow it," Lord Glen answered, handing the pen to Miss Micah so she could add a balcony around the tree house.

Then everyone, including the guard knights, looked over our blueprint.

“Are we finished?” I asked, getting nods from everyone present.

Reading over the blueprint repeatedly, I let my imagination run wild. *It'd be nice if the tree was like this...* I thought to myself before casting my Skill. “I’ll make a seed that grows a tree and tree house just as written in our blueprint—[Seed Creation]!”

With a light little *pop*, a coin-shaped seed appeared. Drawn on one side was a house, while the other had a large tree.

“My appraisal results say it’s called a ‘Tree House Seed.’ It grows into a tree with an attached tree house when planted. If you knock on the trunk with a three-three-seven beat, it’ll degrade and become fertilizer. It’s a single-generation seed, so it won’t grow any flowers or fruit,” Lord Glen read off, looking somewhat into the distance when he was finished.

“Um... What is a ‘three-three-seven beat’?” I asked, never having heard the term before.

Lord Glen took my hand and started tapping his pointer finger on my palm. Three taps, rest, three taps, rest, then finishing with seven taps. “That’s the three-three-seven beat.”

“It’s a strange rhythm.”

“It comes from a country far, far away. Not many people know the pattern since it’s a bit complicated, so no one’ll accidentally tap it out and break down the tree while we’re inside the tree house.”

“You’re right. I don’t think anyone would accidentally tap in that rhythm. That’s a relief,” I said, only to realize that all eyes were on the Tree House Seed.

Ele’s eyes were sparkling, while Miss Micah’s tail was wagging full-speed. Even the guard knights looked excited.

They all must want it planted, I thought, then turned to Lord Glen. “Um...would you like to plant it as a test?”

Since I’d created the seed to give to him as thanks, it was his seed.

He smiled and nodded. “I guess I’ve got no choice if everyone’s this excited.”

“Yay~!” cried Miss Micah.

“If you will be planting it, you should do so a short distance from the rest stop... How about there?” suggested Ele, getting smiles and nods from the guards.

We all moved to the area that Ele had pointed to.

“I’ll plant it here then,” I said, dropping the coin-shaped Tree House Seed to the ground.

It burrowed itself into the ground as soon as it made contact, and immediately began sprouting. In an instant, it grew from a sprout to a tree trunk, then expanded up as a huge tree in the blink of an eye. Once the tree was finished growing, the trunk started puffing up from the middle of the tree upward.

“I-It’s poofing out~?”

After it had grown to about twice the original width of the tree, the puffed portion transformed into a box-shaped house with a balcony, just like our blueprint had detailed. Once it was done expanding, a vine-like thing grew down to the ground from the side of the balcony, turning into stairs.

“I had no idea it would grow like that...” I murmured. Everyone present nodded in agreement.

While we tested the vine-steps to make sure they could hold our weight, Ele floated up to the tree house in his Spirit form, peeking inside the window.

“...Are my eyes deceiving me?” I heard him murmur.

We were curious as to what he meant, so we climbed the staircase, Miss Micah and I following behind Lord Glen. Once we got up to the same height as Ele, we looked inside the window.

The inside of the tree house was a simple house made of boards, just as we’d written into the blueprint. It was as big as my room at the Royal Research Institute, if not bigger. At the size it was, I’d have no trouble fitting a kitchen and stove. It was big enough that I could even add a sofa and table, and make a room for all of the guard knights and the coachman to sleep.

As additional possibilities came to mind, I heard Miss Micah cry out. “Wh-Wh-What~?! The sizes outside and inside don’t match~!”

Now that she mentioned it, I remembered that it was only big enough for four beds in the blueprint’s outside illustration. Since we weren’t putting anything inside at that point, we hadn’t really thought about the size of the interior.

“Let’s go inside for now.”

Nodding to Lord Glen’s suggestion, we opened the door to the tree house. The inside was just as big as it had looked through the window.

“It really is huge...” murmured Lord Glen, putting a hand to his chin as he looked around curiously.

“At this size, camping will be simple,” Ele said, still floating as he moved all around the room.

Miss Micah, on the other hand...was just frozen in shock out in the entranceway.

“I used a ton of mana to get a detailed appraisal, but the inside apparently works in the same way as an Item Box does,” Lord Glen explained, looking at the roof, floor, and balcony.

“Huh—wait, we’ve got no time to be shocked~! We need to think about what we’re putting in here~!” Miss Micah said, walking inside to stand beside me. “If we want to make it like Chelsea’s room back at the Research Institute, we’d need to put a sofa and low table here~”

“Then the kitchen would be somewhere over here,” I said,

pointing to the left of the entrance as Miss Micah nodded.

I walked farther in before stopping.

“The dining table and chairs would be here, while the bed would be over there,” I noted, imagining my adorable big bed with its canopy. “It’s fun imagining what we’d do with the space.”

“Exciting, huh~!”

After that, Miss Micah and I had fun discussing what furniture we’d put inside if we were making it like an inn room, or what we’d need to make for camping.

Once we’d all gotten a good look at the tree house, it was time to leave. We all gathered at the base of its tree.

“I’ll break it down so no one can misuse it,” Lord Glen said, knocking on the trunk in the three-three-seven rhythm.

The tree immediately dissolved like sand, becoming fertilizer. Since it was so big, it kicked up a big puff of dust, getting everyone dirty. I rushed to use *Clean* on everyone. *I’m so glad I learned how to use magic!*

After I’d cleaned everyone off and heaved a sigh of relief, Lord Glen approached me.

“I didn’t think it’d end up being such a fun seed,” he said, smiling amusedly.

“Was it enough of a thank-you for teaching me magic?” I asked.

His smile grew wide, and he patted me on the back.

“You’re the only person who can create any seed you wish for, so it was perfect. Thank you.”

I did it to thank him, but he’s thanking me instead... I felt a bit embarrassed.

Afterword

Hello, this is Milli-gram. It sure has been a while.

Thank you so much for buying volume four of *I'll Never Set Foot in That House Again!* In this volume, Chelsea and friends depart Chronowize and head to the Martec Republic by way of the Radzuel Empire to the west.

We've got two main attractions here!

First is Chelsea using her Skill so much! Having been freed from the restraints of her past and now thinking it's okay to grant her own wishes, her imagination is allowed to run free, and without brakes at that. Since we'd hit all of the requirements, I had her making *soooo* many seeds. As her creator, I want Chelsea to have all the fun she can.

The second main attraction is the explosion scene! I hadn't written it into the planned plot, but it just appeared before I knew it... When I told my editor I'd like to have the scene illustrated, it was close to being shelved for being too surreal... But thanks to my selfish wish as creator to see Chelsea and Glen in a comedic sense, it really did get illustrated. It was much cuter than I'd expected, and I couldn't stop grinning.

Now, let me get to my usual thanks. First off, thank you Yuki Kana-sensei for going along with my absurd orders. To my editor Y-san, for always warmly watching over me. Everyone in sales, proofreaders, designers, printers, every bookstore carrying *I'll Never Set Foot*. Thank you R-san, who was always making sure I was hydrated every time I spoke to them. M-san, for giving me ideas when I had writer's block. And everyone who picks this book up.

Thank you all so very much! I hope everyone involved in this book stays healthy!

Milli-gram

I'll Never Set Foot in That House Again!

4

Author Milli-gram

Illustrator Yuki Kana





Micah

Chelsea's
personal chef.

Glenarnold

Younger brother of the
King of Chronowize,
and Chelsea's fiancé.

Royz

Current Emperor of
the Radrael Empire.

Chelsea

A young research
fellow engaged to Glen.

A large blue bird with long, thin ears and a white face with a single orange eye is shown in profile, looking towards a young girl. The girl has long pink hair with a braid, purple eyes, and is wearing a blue dress with a white collar and a pink sash. She is holding a small, glowing yellow object. The background is a dark blue stone wall with a glowing yellow orb and a purple flower. The scene is set at night with a full moon visible in the background.

The big bird
chirped
like it was
wondering
what the two
of us were
talking about.

«Ima Communication
Spiwit! I have no name
yet. Who're you?»

“Chirp-chirp chirup.”

«‘Simurgh’!»

Simurgh,
the big bird,
nodded.

Bonus Short Stories

The Communication Spirit

I'm the Communication Spirit. I was born on the edge of the Spirit World, and I lived just floating around.

One day, the Spirit King said to me, "I will be giving my contractor Lady Chelsea a storage room. Would any of you like to take care of it?"

"What's a storage room?" I asked, still floating lightly.

The Spirit King smirked. "A space for Lady Chelsea to store interesting things, boring things, anything she wants to keep."

"Why do you need someone to take care of it?"

"Someone needs to be present when she wants items stored, and also to return items when wished for."

"Is it hard?"

"Mayhaps, but you'll be able to see sweets from the human world and many other strange things you wouldn't see in the Spirit world."

If I remember right, sweets from the human world are supposed to smell good, look cute...and maybe even sparkle! I thought. And what does he mean by "things you wouldn't see in the Spirit world"? I'm super interested!

"That sounds fun! I'll take care of the storage room!"

And so, I became one of the Spirits managing Lady Chelsea's storage. Inside the room was a round sphere that connected to the Spirit Tree Bracelet that she wore. We also could hear her wishes from the sphere.

Many other Spirits managed the storage room, and we all took turns waiting for her to wish for us to store something or give it back. But Lady Chelsea seemed to be really reserved, and only ever gave us her plant book to hold. I had so much free time that I started listening to her voice for other things.

And then, I heard that she was in trouble, so I quickly told one of the Great Spirits still in the Spirit world!

After this happened a few times, the Spirit King suddenly came to see me.

"Your rank has increased by one, and you've become a Communication Spirit. Your first job is to go to the human world and tell Lady Chelsea that help is on the way."

I immediately went through her Spirit Tree Bracelet to the human

world. I first saw Lady Chelsea as she looked worried, and it made me really want to protect her! Then, I greeted her and said someone was coming to save her. I'll never forget how relieved she'd looked.

Ever since then, I would return to the human world as often as possible. I couldn't stay long, though, because I was so low-ranked, and without a name.

When a Spirit gets named, their rank rises, and they can stay in the human world longer. My current goal is to have Lady Chelsea give me a name, and for that, I'll need to grant one of her wishes. That means I've gotta become a strong enough Spirit to grant wishes.

"I'm gonna do my best!"

Refreshment

One day during our stay in the Radzuel Empire, Miss Micah said to me, "Sometimes you need to refresh yourself~!"

Afterwards, she brought me out of my room. I didn't know what was going on, so I followed along. Before I knew it, we were in the kitchenette beside Lord Royz's office. This was where maids would make tea for him while he worked, and likely wasn't a place someone from a different country like me should be.

Confused, I tilted my head, and Miss Micah whispered, "Good, no one's here~"

After making sure we were alone, she started knocking on a wall in the room with a peculiar rhythm. A moment later, the wall flipped, and you could see a path for people to go through on the other side.

"Huh?!" I gasped in surprise. Miss Micah just laughed happily.

"We're going to a secret spot~" she said, taking my hand and leading me through the opening behind the flipped wall. Once we were inside, it went back to normal.

"Is it really okay for me to be here?" I asked. *Like, is someone from Chronowize allowed to enter a secret area within Radzuel's castle? In fact, here I am already on my way to one.*

"It's fine if it's you~!" she responded brightly to my worry. "But anyway, since it's easy to get lost in here, we'll need to hold hands~"

Then, she started walking slowly, with our hands linked together.

The secret passage had light coming in through cracks in the hall, so it was brighter than I expected. *I probably won't fall...*

As my mind wondered about our destination, we proceeded through the passage and up some stairs. Just as I lost track of where we were, we stopped in a really open space.

"We're here~!" Miss Micah said, letting go of my hand and pushing against a nearby wall. It split with a crack, and I could see the entirety of the imperial capital.

“Are we...at the very top of the castle?”

“Yup~! You can’t get here without taking that secret passage~” she said, smiling like a child who’d just successfully pulled off a prank. “I’ll be happy if this refreshes you, even just a little~!”

Going through my first ever secret passage was really exciting.

“I’m definitely up for refreshing moments like this,” I said, returning her smile with my own.

The Big Squirrel

On our way back to Chronowize from the Martec Republic, we reached the town we’d be staying in for the night earlier than planned. Lord Glen and I took this opportunity to go exploring.

“Let’s go outside the city today,” he said, taking my hand.

Usually, we would stay in town, looking at the shop stalls and buying souvenirs. *Is there something outside of it to see?* I thought as we passed through the town gate. Then we veered from the main road to a byroad and ended up in a field of flowers.

“Wow... It’s so pretty!” I said as I marveled at the scenery. “And it smells wonderful.”

Lord Glen gave a happy smile, and said, “The guard at the gate told me about this place.”

When Lord Glen asked for more information, he was told that locals often came to the field to relax.

As we walked around the flowers, taking care not to step on any, we suddenly heard the squeaks of an animal. It was a faint cry that sounded like it was in pain. We listened carefully to pinpoint the source, and we soon realized it was from a big squirrel, the size of a rabbit. The squirrel was at the base of one of the trees surrounding the field and was bleeding.

“It’s hurt?” I asked worriedly as the two of us bent down to check on it. The big squirrel looked at us and squeaked weakly, but it didn’t run.

“From the size, I thought it might be a monster, but it seems to just be a type of squirrel. Apparently, it was bitten by a wolf,” Lord Glen surmised after staring at it momentarily. Then, he put his hand out. “Heal its wounds—[Cure].”

The moment he murmured his Skill name, the big squirrel was enveloped in a pale light, and its wounds healed instantly. When it realized that it wasn’t in pain anymore, it stopped crying and looked between the two of us.

“It’s great that you’re all better, huh?” I said as the squirrel came close to me.

It briefly sniffed my clothes, then lowered its head in my

direction.

“Does it want pets?” I wondered, gently petting it on the head. The big squirrel’s eyes narrowed happily, and its big tail swayed.

“Why not try your telepathy, since you’ve got this chance?”

Telepathy was the ability I got when I’d made a contract with the Communication Spirit Root, and it let me talk with things I touched with my mind. I’d spoken with Simurgh, a sacred bird, so I could probably use it on other animals.

Nodding to Lord Glen’s suggestion, I used my telepathy on the squirrel.

< Can you hear me, Mr. Squirrel? > I asked.

The squirrel froze in shock.

< I’m using telepathy to speak to you, > I explained, and the big squirrel pressed its head into my hand in understanding.

< Healed me. Thank you. Give reward. Come, > said the squirrel, before backing away from me and walking into the nearby forest.

Lord Glen and I looked at each other, then followed behind. We ended up at the base of a big tree a short distance from the flower field. The squirrel ran right up the tree before descending to us with an acorn. Readjusting the acorn in its little forepaws, it held it out towards us. When I took it with both hands, the big squirrel ran away and disappeared into the depths of the forest.

“Apparently, this is a reward,” I explained to Lord Glen, since he hadn’t heard our telepathic conversation. Then, I showed him the acorn.

“This is the biggest one I’ve ever seen,” he replied in awe, looking at the acorn in my hands that was bigger than my fist.

“Maybe eating acorns like this is what made that squirrel grow so big,” I murmured.

“You might be right,” he said with a chuckle.

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I'll Never Set Foot in That House Again! Volume 4
by Milli-gram

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